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## **African American Teachers' Perspectives on Principals' Leadership Styles and the Influence on Teacher Morale**

Ernestine Young

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African American Teachers' Perspectives on Principals' Leadership Styles and the  
Influence on Teacher Morale

by

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## **Dedication**

To my loving, deceased parents, Ernest and Mary Lee, I dedicate my dissertation work to you. There remains a unique feeling of gratitude in my heart. I appreciate the words of encouragement, and push for tenacity continues to ring in my ears. I thank my siblings Ava, Angela, Teavis, and Ernie, for offering words of encouragement. Finally, I want to express my sincere appreciation to my many family members, friends, and church family who have supported me throughout the process. Also, I would like to dedicate my research project in honor of Ms. Lorraine Wilson. She was one of the teachers who participated in the study. It is with heartfelt sympathy that we loss Lorraine on July 9, 2020. May her hard work and passion for education live on for many years to come.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

Morale is a concept that denotes how workers feel about their work and the environment in which they work (Robbins, 2003). Low teacher morale is not a new problem; however, with increasing frequency of low morale, teachers are affected all over the nation because of the financial and academic toll it has on education. Low morale typically impedes the achievement of the organization's desired outcome and corresponds with unresolved grievances, attrition, and high absenteeism. Low morale is associated with billions of dollars spent per year. Low morale is due to effects such as stress, teacher burnout, absenteeism, attrition, and small student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to explore former and current African American teachers' perspectives on how principals' leadership style impacts teacher morale and if the principals make a conscious effort to incorporate anti-racism techniques. This study identified the leadership styles commonly used by the principals in the rural school district, teachers' descriptions of their level of morale and what might cause low morale, how principal leadership practices affect morale, and the influence of job performance and job satisfaction. The study examined these subjects based on the perspectives of 12 current middle and high school teachers and two former middle and high school teacher. Former teachers were included in the study to get their perspectives from working in the school district and the reason for leaving. Most importantly, I want to find out if they would return back to the district. This study is a qualitative case study with a

phenomenological interpretative design. The study aims to provide detailed examinations of personal lived experience. the researcher collected data through interviews.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The principal's role in American education has undergone several significant changes over time: from 1699—the year in which the first Colonial principle, Ezekiel Cheever, was appointed as principal of Boston Latin Grammar School (Morris, 2014)—to the present day. According to Rousmaniere (2013), the principal's office was focused almost solely on administration and management until the second half of the 19th century; until then, “There was virtually no conception of the principal’s role as a community or intellectual leader. The principal served as a functional manager only, with specific responsibilities only for addressing student registration and discipline” (p. 23). In 1871, William Torrey Harris, then Superintendent of Schools in St. Louis, MO, suggested that one of the principal's functions should be to increase teachers’ morale (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 27). Harris suggested that principals should not only manage student affairs, oversee the curriculum, and enforce professional standards of excellence, but should also provide emotional support to teachers. Once introduced, the idea of the principal’s responsibility for the morale and other aspects of the emotional well-being of teachers took root in American education, and, in contemporary times, principals routine expectations include providing morale-building for teachers (Moolenaar & Slegers, 2014).

Education is a primary pillar for personal development and societal advancement, and teachers are central to attaining the goals in educational systems. Therefore, retaining teachers and assuring their effectiveness is paramount to the success of the

educational systems (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). Teacher morale provides a positive impetus for teachers to work effectively and protects against the effects of burnout and resultant turnover (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Teachers with high morale challenge themselves, care about their students, and remain engaged and energetic (Bolkan, Goodboy, & Griffin, 2011; Kim, Kim, Lee, Spector, & DeMeester, 2013).. Conversely, teachers with low morale experience difficulty caring for students, pursuing professional development, and remaining on the job (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of teachers in South Carolina to evaluate how principals' leadership styles affect teachers' morale, and how principals' leadership practices influence job performance and job satisfaction. Besides, this study included consideration of whether principals' leadership styles incorporate anti-racism techniques. This chapter presents the background on the school district that functioned as the setting for this study, an overview of morale, and this study's problem statement, research objectives, conceptual framework, and definitions of key terms.

### **Background on Morale**

Morale is a concept that denotes how workers feel about their work and their work environment (Ahmad, Schroder, & McKnight, 2001). Low teacher morale is associated with billions of dollars in annual costs due to stress, teacher burnout, absenteeism, attrition, and low student achievement (Littleford, 2007). Evidence indicates that low morale links to low levels of teacher satisfaction, which leads to high attrition and turnover rates. According to the MetLife Survey conducted in 2012, teacher satisfaction has declined to its lowest point from 1985 to 2012, while stress among teachers has increased. In 1985, 36% of teachers felt they were under enormous pressure,

which has risen to 51% over a twenty-five-year period. The report also noted that teacher job satisfaction levels had dropped 23% since 2008. The survey found that the number of teachers who self-reported as very satisfied dropped from 44% to 39% from 2011 to 2012 alone (Blackburn, 2015). Educational institutions' ability to fulfill their goals of providing quality education to students decreases when large numbers of teachers leave their jobs or the profession due to low satisfaction and low morale (Blackburn, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The principal is responsible for assuring high school performance by using available human and material resources (Edmonds, 2009). Accordingly, school principals are responsible for establishing an environment in which levels of teacher morale and satisfaction are high and sustained (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; Nir & Hameiri, 2014; McKinney, Labat Jr., & Labat, 2015). About establishing a positive environment, it is essential to understand African American teachers' perspectives on how principals' leadership styles influence their morale.

While there are many quantitative studies concerning the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale, such studies cannot, because of quantitative research's intrinsic limitations, answer how principal leadership influences teacher morale. For instance, some researchers have noted that morale is an intangible element and is challenging to define (Houchard, 2005; Rauf, Akter, Iqbal, & Malik, 2013). Examples of intangible factors that employees may experience in the workplace may include associations, values, emotions, feelings, or imagery. Because morale is an abstract concept, it is challenging to apply quantitative measures based on measurable data and focus on measuring cause and effect relationships. Qualitative research includes a multicomponent that relates to and involves a naturalistic approach to its subject matter

and an interpretive result. In essence, a qualitative research study supports the elements in their natural environment and setting and aims to address the phenomena and interpret the meaning that people bring to them. Qualitative research is based on data such as feelings, words, and perceptions to explain events in their natural contexts, making it an appropriate methodology with which to explore theoretical dimensions of morale and the factors that influence morale (Bacharach, 1989).

Several qualitative studies have addressed the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale, the leadership-morale relationship's distinctive nature depends on local practice contexts and circumstantial differences. Therefore, additional qualitative research on this topic is required, particularly in a case study format. There is a gap in the existing literature that consists of understanding the nature of morale and the processes through which principal leadership styles influence it. This study addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring a leadership-morale model in a local practice context. The study will examine African American teachers' perspectives on school principals' leadership styles and morale and assess whether principals consciously make anti-racism decisions.

This study aims to obtain rich data that will contribute to understanding dimensions of teacher morale, how morale and leadership practices interact in the school systems. How low morale among teachers is prevented. Previous research projects have addressed school principals' various leadership styles (transformational, situational, authoritative, and transactional). However, few research studies have examined the impact of principal leadership styles in rural South Carolina schools. The proposed research is relevant to the setting.



## **Problem Statement**

Low morale among teachers negatively impacts teaching and learning processes in schools. Research indicates that when leaders are empathetic (Pressley, 2012), effective at communicating with others (Fullan, 2011), and trustworthiness (Meador, 2016), morale increases. Teacher burnout associated with low morale represents the most significant reason teachers leave the teaching profession (Bousquet, 2012). The rate of attrition for teachers of color is higher than for their white counterparts; research evidence indicates that teachers of color leave the education field at an annual rate 24% higher than white teachers (Ingersoll & May 2011). In particular, African American teacher turnover rates have been significantly higher than those of other races (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). According to research, teachers of color work in unsupportive environments (Jackson & Kohli, 2016). Besides, these teachers have limited access and support from colleagues, work in schools with limited resources and receive low wages, among other factors that can lead to low job performance, low job satisfaction, and burnout among this group (Jackson, 2015). The present study will explore principal leadership styles to determine whether principals make an intentional effort to incorporate anti-racism techniques in the workplace.

A principal's leadership style has a direct impact on teacher morale (Lambersky, 2016). The specific problem is that, without exploring how principal leadership style impacts teacher morale, it will remain unknown how this style affects variables such as teacher attendance, job satisfaction, and job performance. In the target setting for this qualitative case study, a rural public school district, the recording of high teacher turnover for the past three years, especially at the middle and high school levels, is evident. The school district has also experienced high absenteeism levels among teachers and a lack of

motivation among teachers to engage with school activities, suggesting low teacher morale (School Secretary, personal communication, December 2018). The rural, public school district, located in the Pee Dee area of South Carolina, has 3,527 students. Ninety-two percent of the students qualify for free or reduced meals. The district employs 227 teachers, including 165 African American teachers, 10 Jamaican teachers, six African teachers, and 46 Caucasian teachers. The study population was delimited to African American teachers because it is challenging to attract and retain African American teachers in this rural district.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore African American teachers' perspectives on leadership style and the influence on teacher morale. Also, the study will examine if anti-racism plays a role in the school principals' decisions. This study's data consisted of 14 teachers from a rural school district in South Carolina. The research approach for the analysis was qualitative, with a phenomenological interpretive design. Understanding the functional constructs of principal leadership styles and behavior and how they interface with teacher morale will have important implications for effective principal leadership practices that improve teacher morale, performance, and retention.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions used to guide this study were:

1. How do African American teachers describe their level of morale, and what might cause low morale?
2. What principal leadership styles do African American teachers identify as important in influencing teacher performance and job satisfaction?

3. Do African American teachers feel that principals intentionally consider anti-racism concepts when making a decision?

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was based on a qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative studies explore phenomena in their natural contexts using qualitative data such as words, feelings, and perceptions (Creswell, 2014). The study's qualitative methods facilitated the investigation of teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership styles and practices and how they influence their morale. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, seeks to measure cause and effects in relationships. Under this methodology, descriptive and inferential statistics are applied to measure concepts and make inferences based on the sample (Creswell, 2014). The quantitative method was, therefore, not suitable for this study. Specifically, this study employs a phenomenological interpretative design to examine the relationship between leadership styles and teacher morale. This design was fitting as the study was based on identifying specific behavioral and emotional phenomena through an open-ended interview exploration of participants' experiences.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of this study was to understand African American teachers' perceptions of principal leadership styles and how they impact teacher morale. One of the conceptual frameworks for this qualitative study is leadership style as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1968). The Hierarchy of Needs consists of five levels and suggests that each desires to attain each pyramid's level. Maslow's theory is based on the premise that individuals must satisfy their most basic needs before caring about needs at a higher level and moving up the hierarchy toward self-actualization. Maslow's framework applies to all aspects of the relationships involved in this study.

For example, Maslow's theory can apply to the classroom teacher's role and relationship with the school principal. The fundamental needs of security and belonging must be established for the classroom teacher to achieve a higher demand for self-esteem and confidence. The principal can play a vital role in the lives of teachers in the school. Leadership practices that foster a positive environment and promote a high level of teacher morale can, at a minimum, satisfy the needs of safety and security for teachers, and ultimately meet their needs for belonging and love. Each level of Maslow's hierarchy builds upon the satisfaction of the requirements at lower levels; similarly, the lower level needs foundations built on teacher morale to meet the teachers' needs. The highest level of the pyramid is self-actualization. Teachers get the opportunity to fulfill their highest level of attainment. The teacher moves from the initial stage of looking for safety and security to moving to fulfilling the needs to improve the culture and environment of the school at the self-actualization level.

The conceptual framework is based on the theory that excellent leadership elevates people and promotes excellence of behavior and action among those who report to the leader. Burns (1978) coined the term, transformational leaders, and defines this type of leader as one who elevates the followers' level of consciousness about the importance and value of desired outcomes and the methods of reaching those outcomes. Studies show that transformational leaders persuade their followers to surpass and transcend their self-interest for the organization. At the same time, "the followers' level of need on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy from lower-level concerns for safety and security to higher-level needs for achievement and self-actualization" (Bass, 2008, p. 619). Burns defines leadership as leaders who persuade their followers to aspire to specific goals that constitute the leader and follower's wants, needs, and values. In his study, Burns insists

that leaders must impact the followers through appealing actions and shared values, leading to higher-order needs that result in their aspirations and expectations. He stated that leadership conversion transcends to a level of moral in that it raises the human conduct code and ethical goals of the leader and the led that results in transforming effects on both (Burns, 1978). In turn, the newly invigorated citizen is inspired to succeed in whatever endeavor he or she chooses. When ancient ideas are applied to this study, it is evident that a school principal's leadership should be competent. Ultimately, if it improves the teachers' motivation, character, and ability, it makes them more effective at their trade, thus improving their morale.

Therefore, in the context of the proposed study, it is assumed that, when principal leadership styles support teacher satisfaction and well-being, their morale will be high. These principal leadership theories will be examined in detail to identify their associated behaviors and practices and how they influence teacher morale. Further, they are essential to this study's assessment of whether anti-racism plays a role in school principals' decisions.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

This section presents definitions of the critical term used in the study. This section includes discussions of how the terms apply to the context of the present study.

**Anti-racism:** Anti-racism is defined as the active process of identifying and eliminating racism through a prearranged restructuring of organizational structures, policies, practices, attitudes, and entire systems to redistribute power on an equitable basis (Lentin, 2016). The practice of anti-racism requires examination of power balances between racialized and non-racialized groups (i.e., whites). These power imbalances are evidenced by unearned privileges benefitting non-racialized groups that are not available

to racialized groups. Inequalities in power can be identified, challenged, and eliminated through shifts in the ways individuals see the world and interact with others at all levels of society by using an anti-racism approach (Lentin, 2016).

**Anti-racist Leader:** An anti-racist leader is one who engages in the practice of anti-racism through the examination of power imbalances and active work against the systems, policies, procedures, and attitudes that create and support them (Diem, Carpenter, & Lewis-Durham, 2018). Anti-racist school leaders understand that existing policies produce inequities through practices such as school choice initiatives that have implications for imbalances in racial and socioeconomic power structures. Through the exercise of racial awareness and their own identities as anti-racist school leaders, these individuals make a conscious effort to change circumstances for their students, staff, and communities (Diem et al., 2018).

**Burnout:** Burnout is a phenomenon that involves emotional exhaustion and depersonalization as its core elements (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). Emotional exhaustion is the stress dimension of burnout; it manifests as a lack of energy alongside a feeling that the individual's emotional resources are used. In teacher functioning, emotional exhaustion promotes teachers' distancing themselves emotionally and cognitively from their work. Depersonalization describes an indifference to co-workers, clients, and the organization (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015). Burnout is closely related to morale in that when morale is low, burnout is high (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2015).

**Critical Race Theory:** Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework utilizing critical theory to examine society and culture with race, law, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016). Critical Race Theory holds that racial power—particularly white supremacy—maintains over time through society's laws and policies. Critical Race

Theory relies on the belief in the possibility of transforming the existing relationships between power and the laws that provide a framework for its uneven distribution (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016).

**Institutionalized Racism:** Institutional racism is a form of racism expressed in social and political institutions that perpetuates laws and practices that provide different access to goods, services, and opportunities for other racial groups (Atkin, 2018).

Institutional racism Institutional racism produces disparities in wealth, justice, employment, housing, health access to goods, services, and opportunities for other racial groups (Atkin, 2018). Institutional racism produces disparities in wealth, justice, employment, housing, health care, politics, and education. This form of racism distinguishes racial bias and individual attitudes by its presence in systematic policies, practices, and societal institutions' laws.

**Leadership:** Leadership is described in the literature as behavior that influences group members to achieve group or organizational goals (Northouse, 2013). Forster (2005) distinguished leadership from management as follows: “Leadership is usually concerned with *what* needs to be done—management often focuses on *how* things should be done” (p. 5). For this study's purposes, three leadership styles are examined:

transformational, transactional, and *laissez-faire* leadership.

**Morale:** Morale is “the degree to which an employee feels good about his or her work and work environment” (Ahmad et al., 2001, p. 467). Morale has also been defined as the amount of enthusiasm and confidence an individual or group possesses at a given time (“Morale,” 2002). Morale entails elements that express how teachers feel about their work, also the enthusiasm and confidence.

## **Significance of the Study**

Low teacher morale is associated with significant consequences for teachers, students, schools, and the educational system as a whole (Littleford, 2007). Studies on principal leadership and teacher morale are complicated because teacher morale may be challenging to define and is affected by different factors in different local settings. Similarly, leadership styles can also be complex to explain in practice. This study constituted an attempt to understand the influence of principal leadership on teacher morale using an overall research structure designed to relate multiple possible dimensions of principal leadership to various aspects of teacher morale. The study carries a potential for social change, as educators and policyholders find ways to improve principals' understanding of the conditions that influence African American teacher morale and enable a sustainable teaching workforce in rural public schools. The study's conclusions may contribute essential insights regarding low teacher morale to help leaders and policymakers understand and work to possibly reduce the problem of low teacher morale and methods to recruit more African American teachers. Additionally, the study has local significance in its ability to inform a particular school district about principal leadership's influence, thereby possibly providing a justification for promoting certain kinds of principal leadership over others.

The next sections will provide an overview of the district. The information includes the county and district background data.

### **County Background Information**

Williamsburg County was probably named after King William III of England (1650–1702) (“History of Williamsburg,” n. d.). Scotch-Irish and French Huguenot settlers moved into this part of the Lowcountry around 1732, and in 1736, the township



was laid out along the Black River in the vicinity of the settlement of the town. The area was part of Prince Frederick Parish, which, in turn, was part of Georgetown District. In 1804, the county became a separate district with a seat at the town. Later, in 1888, a small amount of the district became Florence County. During the Revolutionary War, many of General Francis Marion's men hailed from this area, including Major John James (1732–1791). The battles of Black Mingo (September 1780), Mount Hope Swamp (March 1781), and Lower Bridge (March 1781) were all fought in the county. The county has remained an agriculture-focused region, and geneticist Joseph L. Goldstein, a winner of a Nobel Peace Prize, grew up in the local town.

The county has established goals and objectives and performance measures to ensure that those goals and objectives are met. These goals include ethics and accountability, efficient and effective government, quality constituent services, and *people over politics*. The purpose of these goals is to provide high-quality public services to customers and constituents, improve how the county government does business, strengthen its financial position, and invest in and create job opportunities for the workforce.

Williamsburg County has a population of 31,600 people. The median income is \$30,976, and the county is 32.9% White and 65.1% Black. In terms of education, 80.1% of the residents graduated from high school, and 12.6% hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. Almost 16% of those under the age of 65 years have health-related disabilities. Nearly 60% of the county's residents are in the labor force, and 55% of the residents receive social assistance. There are 497 businesses/employers and establishments ("History of Williamsburg," n. d.).

## **District Background Information**

The study's specific setting is a school district located in the Pee Dee area of South Carolina. The district has a long history of providing children with an education that promotes their success beyond the school district. Its mission is to ensure a world-class education for all students by utilizing a rigorous, innovative curriculum focused on creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The district, which includes one primary school, four elementary schools, three middle schools, three high schools, and one vocational career center, currently has approximately 3,500 students. There is also an alternative school for disruptive students with behavior infractions. District enrollment has decreased by 1,000 students since 2008, and this has resulted in the closing of several old schools with low student enrollment. Schools in the district are significant in the community, serving as local hubs. The district employs over 600 full-time certified and classified employees and operates on an annual budget of approximately \$52 million.

All schools in this district are Title I, which means they qualify to receive federal funds to provide children with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills in challenging state content and performance standards. Educational stakeholders have attempted to accomplish such efforts by providing an enriched and accelerated educational program; promoting school-wide reform through school-wide programs or through additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time; significantly upgrading the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development; and providing parents with meaningful opportunities to participate in their children's education both at home and at school.

From 2009 to the present, there have been five superintendents in the district. In 2009, student enrollment was 5,543, and the district received an *unsatisfactory* report card rating on students' academic performance. Ten years later, as of 2019, there were 3,532 students enrolled, and the district still has a *failing* report card rating on students' academic performance. In 2008, there were 13 schools; as of 2019, there are 11 schools in the district. Over the last four years, the district has experienced high teacher turnover rates, mainly in middle and high schools. Teachers continue to express concerns with excessive paperwork to complete, mandates associated with standardized testing, behavioral and classroom management problems, district nuisances, and low school morale.

The district will support teachers and students by providing professional development and giving them relevant resources. The district will also engage teachers in scientific-based research, innovative strategies, and provide the best instructional practices. The following instructional programs enhance the current curriculum in efforts to increase student achievement: A Balanced Literacy Program, Reading First, computer-assisted remediation and enrichment programs, (a) Accelerated Reader, (b) Reading Counts, (c) Accelerated Math, (d) Credit Recovery, (d) instructional technology labs, including Plato and NCS Learn, (e) Standards in Practice, (f) Differentiated Instruction, and (g) career education.

Williamsburg County School District continually develops opportunities to extend challenging and diverse learning opportunities to the students. The curriculum is under constant revision to ensure its alignment with the most current South Carolina curriculum standards for each grade level and subject area. To enhance the curriculum, educational

stakeholders also incorporate web resources, current textbooks, and hands-on learning through manipulative, applied, and integrated approaches. The district attempts to provide a safe environment in all its schools and encourages students to maximize their potential to succeed in a global society.

The district/school system is focused on implementing ideas and supporting practices that serve students and the community alike. In that regard, every effort has been. It continues to be made to move the district on a focused path to higher standards and more significant performance results for students, staff, and administrators. In November 2011, the system was visited by a national team of educational evaluators (AdvancEd), which resulted in every school's accreditation in the district. The districtwide process was recommended to the Board of Trustees to unite the district's schools as a school system rather than emphasizing individual schools and allowing the system to function like schools.

The accreditation and evaluation process, as implemented, also produced substantial financial savings for the school district as it worked to stabilize its financial footing. The system is also continuing to experience academic gains, with most schools demonstrating improvement. More significant increases were shared for the 2012 school year due to consistent and continuous professional development for district and school-level administrators and school-based instructional staff. The district earned seven combined Palmetto Gold and Silver Awards for Excellence in Closing Achievement Gaps and Outstanding Student Academic Performance. The district also received Academic Achievement Flags (four Gold and one Silver) for display at the local school level.

Additionally, the district's first Comprehensive Choice Program was developed with the implementation of a magnet school. Auditions for the district's magnet program

were conducted in February of 2012. The system also initiated its first Hall of Fame Scholarship Gala on May 18, 2012, to recognize outstanding graduates and contributors to the school district. During these galas, funds earned are used to provide scholarships for district graduates enrolled at two- or four-year colleges.

This scholarship program is one way to ensure that students know that the School Board and the larger system value their education and supports their efforts to become productive, contributing citizens. The district was acknowledged for having 1 of the 10 South Carolina students qualify for the prestigious Gates Millennium Scholarships. Additionally, the district exceeded its 2011 senior class scholarship record and envisioned the continuation of that trend for the 2013 school year. Overall, significant progress has been made throughout the district, but there is still much more to be done.

The district's primary goal is to increase student achievement levels. Alternative programs (i.e., HOPE Academy) are offered at the middle and high school levels to students who are not successful in the traditional school setting. The district also provides after-school programs, tutoring, and credit-recovery options to help students need additional assistance. Professional development for teachers has emphasized engaging students in rigorous integration of English Language Arts (ELA) into content areas across all disciplines. In all academic areas, the district is committed to ensuring each student's academic success. Assessment data are used to help teachers design classroom instruction that is responsive to each student's educational needs. Despite economic hardships, students in the district continue to excel, earning perfect scores on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) and reading and math assessments in 2014. Several elementary and middle school students were selected in 2015 to participate in

Duke University's talent search program, which gives students access to online curriculum and lessons in writing, mathematics, science, and architecture.

Several 11th graders received WorkKeys certificates, indicating their readiness for the workplace. The graduation rate (84%) is an indicator of the district's dedication to equipping students with the skills they need, such as 21st-century skills, college and career skills, and other life skills. Interest in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics School (STEMS) program is high as it expands at the high school level. The gifted and talented academic and artistic programs are excellent examples of innovative programs that have accelerated students' performance.

Williamsburg County School District continuously revisits its technology plan, allowing elementary, middle, and high school students to take certain technological devices home for one-to-one computer use. Instructional technology leads district efforts in ongoing professional development for teachers to ensure that students are using these tools most effectively to become college and career ready. Williamsburg County School District is committed to excellence and determined to accelerate academic progress.

The district implements teaching and learning strategies that focus on standards-based classrooms while embracing the child's development. The plan addresses students' needs to ensure that they are successful at all levels. The district has redesigned academic programs by partnering with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) to provide additional professional development for its educators. Teachers and administrators are actively engaged in proven research-based professional development that enhances learning for all students, such as High Schools That Work and Middle Schools That Work. The district has established partnerships with area businesses and higher learning institutions to ensure that students are receiving updated knowledge of business and

industry expectations and exposed to cutting-edge technology that will allow them to advance in their chosen career fields.

In the district, efforts have been concentrated toward reading at all grade levels. Reading coaches (as aligned with evidence-based practice) are being used to improve students' reading at the primary and elementary levels and boost their performance on standardized tests. The district is currently using, for a second year, a student assessment tool with plans to use this baseline to improve test scores by continuing to focus on teaching standards at a level that students can access. The district's new "C3 Curriculum" (College, Careers, and Citizenship), established with input from exceptional professionals across the district, has strengthened the quality of instruction for students and enhanced their ability to master their grade and standards levels core subject areas. Teachers also have the opportunity to explore personalized learning and competency-based education and professional learning opportunities. The graduation rate continues to improve, with 88% percent of students graduating in 4 years.

The 2016–2017 school year brought about many successes for the district and its staff, including earning national accreditation. The district saw an increase in the number of students receiving maximum scores on the ACT and Aspired Assessment in English and Writing. More students were selected and recognized as Duke's Top Talent Identification Scholars. The district recognized 14 students for "outstanding performance" on the science portion of the ACT. The students scored 20 or more. Several students also won national and state awards through participation in the Career and Technology Education (CATE) Program. Several of the district's middle and high school students with outstanding leadership skills have been selected to serve as state and national officers in various organizations. District students are advancing in activities

beyond the classroom, including chess, track, public speaking, mock trials, chorus, band, orchestra, basketball, football, volleyball, and academic challenge. The students' talents are evidenced by their performance in regional and state academic and athletic competitions. Opportunities are also available for students to enroll in college classes while in high school via the dual enrollment program. Also, several district administrators are members of state-level committees and boards and serve as facilitators and keynote speakers at distinguished state and national conventions.

In March 2019, the superintendent introduced a pilot program that included a four-day workweek for elementary and middle school teachers. However, the high school teachers would remain on a five-day schedule. The superintendent envisioned a schedule that supports teachers' two rotating shifts: Group A works from Monday to Thursday, and Group B works from Tuesday to Friday. Concluding the 2020 school year, the superintendent will assess this four-day workweek to determine whether it will be implemented across grades Pre-kindergarten through 12. This concept was introduced to attract teachers to the rural district. Currently, there are no schools in South Carolina that operate on a four-day teacher workweek.

### **Summary**

This introductory chapter provided a general overview and background to the research topic, including the influence of principals' leadership styles on teacher morale. Chapter 2 comprises a comprehensive review of the literature, while Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the study results, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion and recommendations for future research and practice.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Principals need to create warm, conducive environments that promote unity and strength and maintain climates charged with high morale levels to retain qualified teachers. Keeping qualified teachers is paramount for school districts. Similarly, numerous factors contribute to successful teaching. Therefore, it is vital for leaders and policymakers to understand the factors that affect teacher morale to develop strategies that address teacher morale effectively (Blackburn, 2015). As the school leader, the principal is responsible for managing the school's resources to achieve target goals. Understanding the impact of principal leadership on teacher morale and the interaction between the two variables represents an essential foundation for improving teacher morale.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to present a detailed review of the literature on principal leadership styles, teacher morale, and to review empirical evidence on how the two concepts interface. The chapters include an overview of the search strategy adopted for the review; second, it provides theoretical perspectives relevant to principal leadership and teacher morale. Lastly, it consists of discussing related empirical studies on the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale.

The purpose of the current study is to explore African American teachers' perspectives on principals' leadership styles and how this leadership influences teacher

morale. The study also includes examining whether or not anti-racism plays a role in school principals' decision-making process. This chapter will provide an in-depth review of the literature in principal leadership styles and teacher morale and a review of empirical evidence of how the two interface. The chapter includes (1) an overview of the search strategy adopted for the review, (2) the theoretical perspectives relevant to principal leadership and teacher morale, and (3) a discussion of empirical studies on the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale.

The next section will discuss various theories and leadership styles that principals implement to influence the followers.

### **Major Theories and Styles of Leadership**

Leadership is a process or process through which an individual influences a group's members to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2004). Scholars have produced many theories and models of leadership, which can also apply in a school-leadership context. The leadership literature dates back to ancient Greek culture in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C.E., when philosophers, including Aristotle and Plato, speculated on the things that differentiate leaders from followers. The modern leadership literature dates back to the 19th century when sociologists and other social scientists began to study leadership as an objective phenomenon, with particular focus on (a) defining leadership, (b) exploring the components of leadership, and (c) determining the effects of leadership on followers.

Leadership theories are viewed as schools of thought that explain how and why certain individuals pursue leadership roles. The approaches focus on the behaviors, patterns, and traits that individuals can adopt to boost their leadership ability. Five different theories were explored in this literature review: trait theory, the behavioral

approach theory, path-goal theory, the power-influence theory, and the contingency theory. Leadership styles are behavioral patterns that a leader adopts to influence followers' attitudes and behaviors and encourage them to accomplish the given objectives. Nine leadership styles will be discussed below. They include servant, authentic, situational, autocratic, bureaucratic, charismatic, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership.

### **Theories of Leadership**

**Trait theory.** The first stage in the development of contemporary leadership theory was trait theory. The approach, derived from the “great man theory,” is based on the premise that leaders are born, not made (Colbert, Judge, Choi, & Wang, 2012; McKinney et al., 2015). Trait theory emerged from an inductive approach. Social scientists and other scholars attempted to define leadership components by analyzing figures widely acknowledged to be effective leaders and identifying their characteristics (Colbert et al., 2012; McKinney, Labat, & Labat, 2015). This form of analysis purportedly led to leadership being defined as the sum of particular traits that, according to the earliest leadership scholars, were innate for individuals such as Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, and Napoleon (Colbert et al., 2012; McKinney et al., 2015).

The trait theory's characteristics include dominance, ambition, self-esteem, aggressiveness, and intelligence. Other features are physical attributes, including appearance, age, and height. There are also associated skills, such as verbal skills, social skills, technical skills, and group-task supportiveness (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, 2003; Dias, Upperman, & Trumpy, 2016). This theory had important limitations in that a person who had the identified traits ascribed to leadership may not necessarily be a good leader. Moreover, leadership does not identify exclusive traits

(Bolden et al., 2003). However, the cognitive schema of traits can be an essential construct for predicting perceptions or the emergence of leadership (Dias et al., 2016). However, (Bolden et al., 2003), there are no exclusive features in leadership, as a network of abstract thinking forms the basis of leadership. Schemas, which help with information organization and interpretation, can be useful because they allow individuals to take shortcuts in understanding the vast amount of data available in the environment.

**Behavioral approach theory.** In the late 1940s, the focus in leadership research shifted from traits to leader behavior in attempts for researchers to identify practices that led to a leader's increased effectiveness among subordinates (Barnett, 2016; Dias et al., 2016). This shift was driven by the fact that studies of traits did not produce conclusive results. For instance, general characteristics such as courage, integrity, and loyalty cannot be measured. Behaviorism provided the theoretical underpinning for a new era in leadership research, and behavioral theory provided a mechanism for explaining the possibility of learning complex behaviors, including leadership (Skinner, 2014). Behavioral theories describe and emphasize human relationships, performance, and outputs (Bolden et al., 2003). Accordingly, in the next stage in the development of contemporary leadership theory, there was an emergence of various alternatives to trait theory, including ethical leadership theory, authentic leadership theory, distributed leadership theory, transformational leadership theory, servant leadership theory, charismatic leadership, and several other models (Abdelgawad, Zahra, Svejnova, & Sapienza, 2013; Atmojo, 2015; Bird & Mendenhall, 2016; Clinebell, 2014).

**Path-goal leadership theory.** The path-goal leadership theory aptly illustrates the behavioral approach to leadership. Under this theory, the leader shows available rewards and indicates how the reward may be obtained (Barnett, 2016). The leader thus reinforces

a change in behavior that is required from the follower. The leader's behavior represents an operant condition cue, inducing the follower to accomplish a required task or behave in a certain manner (Dias et al., 2016). This leadership approach focuses on the leader's actions, not his or her personal qualities. It is consistent with common leadership styles such as autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, and human relations leadership (Bolden et al., 2003).

**Power-influence theory.** This theory is leader-centered, focusing on the premise that causality occurs as leaders provide direction, and followers act on the leader's guidance. The behavior of followers and other organization members is influenced by leadership power (Bolden et al., 2003; Dias et al., 2016). The leadership effectiveness level depends on the type of power the leader possesses (positional and personal capacity) and how a leader manages this power (Dias et al., 2016). Positional power is the leader's potential influence and the leader-follower relationship, along with the leader's attributes. Personal power refers to potential impact due to the leader's task expertise and followers' friendship and loyalty. An effective leader relies more heavily on his or her ability than on the power inherent in their positions (Dias et al., 2016).

**The contingency theory.** The contingency theory, also known as the situational theory, holds that the effectiveness of leadership traits and behaviors is determined by the organization or work context (Barnett, 2016). There are several contingency theories, such as Fiedler's contingency theory and the Vroom-Yetton-Jago decision-making model. Fiedler's contingency theory was first introduced in 1967, suggesting that situational factors work together with leadership traits and behavior to influence the effectiveness.

The favorability of the situation determines the leadership effectiveness of the task-oriented or person-oriented practice a leader adopts. Favorability is, in turn,

dependent on the level of respect and trust subordinates have for the leader, which includes the extent of structure, the effectiveness of performance measurements, and the leader's control over rewards. Highly favorable situations occur when subordinates respect and trust the leader, the leader maintains control over rewards and tasks, and tasks are highly structured. Task-oriented leaders are more effective when situations are either highly unfavorable or highly favorable, while person-oriented leaders do well in moderately favorable or moderately unfavorable situations (Barnett, 2016).

### **Styles of Leadership**

**Servant leadership.** Greenleaf (1970) developed the notion of servant leadership and subsequently founded a center to teach this form of leadership (Tischler, Giambastista, McKeage, & McCormick, 2016). Greenleaf described servant leadership as a type in which the leader is a servant first. This type of leader begins with the natural feeling of wanting to serve, and this conscious choice leads to the aspiration to lead. Linuesa-Langero, Ruiz-Palomino, and Elche-Horteiano (2017) described two aspects of servant leadership. Firstly, the servant leader extends his or her service to stakeholders (e.g., employees, clients, society), focusing on meeting their needs and improving their well-being. The second manner prioritizes other people's needs over one's self-interest (Linuesa-Langero et al., 2017). Unlike the attitude we see in those who see themselves as leaders first and demonstrate a dominion-over-others strategy, servant-first leaders emphasize followers' and communities' well-being while working towards organizational success (Ingram, 2016).

The servant leader's characteristics include service, modeling, listening, empathy, persuasion, healing, awareness, conceptualization, commitment to others' well-being and growth, foresight, stewardship, and community building. Servant leaders' traits and

values also occur in other leadership styles, such as transformational, ethical, and authentic leadership. The emphasis on followers' well-being and needs is what differentiates servant leadership from different types. Evidence shows a positive relationship between servant leadership and outcome variables at the team (team effectiveness), individual (individual spirituality, teacher job satisfaction, and commitment), and organization (public secondary school performance, school climate, lower absenteeism and attrition, and job safety) levels (Linuesa-Langero et al., 2017).

There are various conceptualizations of the servant-leadership style, including questions about whether servant leaders are made or born. Some scholars argue that leaders teach servant leadership since it is a leadership style (Linuesa-Langero et al., 2017; Tischler et al., 2016). Greenleaf (1970) examined and defined the role of servant-leaders and their contributions to common goods. Greenleaf (1970) stated:

A servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant. The qualities include the first, to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are served. "The best test is: do those served to grow as persons; do they while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what of the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?" (p. 7)

**Authentic leadership.** According to Covelli (2017), the construct of authenticity was credited initially by ancient Greek philosophers. The ultimate message that these philosophers stressed was the importance of being true to themselves. Over 2,400 years later, authenticity entered the management and organizational literature with diverse scholars postulating authenticity to measure executive quality. Authentic leadership, the foundation for decisive leadership, became prevalent in contemporary literature two decades ago in response to numerous corporate scandals. Authentic leadership is a style

in which the leader strives, above all else, to be genuine (Covelli, 2017). Authentic leaders act on personal values, deep convictions, and an attitude to win their followers' trust. Their conduct is characterized by openness, self-awareness, and clarity behavior (Oh & Han, 2017; Yasir, Bahru, Rasli, Qureshi, Ullah, & Khan, 2016).

Yasir et al. (2016) considered authentic leadership

a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes positive, psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate. The climate fosters a greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 18).

Authentic leadership is a multidimensional leadership, which is constructed in the regard that a leader may have any leadership style, including transformational or charismatic, and may incorporate various behaviors and skills into their leadership practice; however, their main objective is to be as authentic as possible (Covelli, 2017). Criticisms of this leadership model include the idea that authenticity can be affected by national origin, socioeconomic status, race, and other factors (Zhang, Everett, Elkin, & Cone, 2012). Another criticism of authentic leadership is that the extent of a leader's authenticity depends on organizational, cultural, and situational contexts, so a single interpretation of the theory is impossible (Zhang et al., 2012).

**Situational leadership.** Situational leadership is a leadership style in which leaders adjust their leadership styles to fit their circumstances or situations. Thus, the situational leader chooses leadership types that support their goals in a particular case (Hattock, Murillo, & Godberson, 2016). Hersey and Blanchard (1969) developed the concept of situational leadership, discussing it as a life-cycle leadership theory (as cited in Hattock, Murillo, & Godberson, 2016). The theorists were inspired by the observation



that parents must change their leadership styles as their children grow from infancy to adulthood (Lerstrom, 2008).

Similarly, different leadership styles are needed for other employees, such as new employees and more experienced workers. According to Ghazzawi, Shoughari, and Osta (2017), situational leadership merges directive and supportive dimensions, which means that each size must be used correctly in the situation at hand. The degree of directness and supportiveness to employees varies based on subordinates' statuses and levels of motivation.

Fiedler's situational contingency model (1964) is based on the premise that no leadership type is ideal, and that "somewhat effective" leadership depends on situational needs. However, it is crucial to differentiate situational leadership from the contingency theory of leadership. The contingency theory states that a leader's effectiveness is contingent upon how their leadership style matches the situation. In other words, a leader must discover the leadership style needed to be successful in his or her position. According to Fiedler's contingency model (1964), a leader is effective when their leadership style fits the situation as the leader can apply various methods and adapt to any situation. Criticism of situational leadership is that not every leader can successfully exhibit this and that this may lead to the organization's failure.

**Autocratic leadership.** Autocratic leadership has been known since historical times because (1) most well-known rulers (e.g., Julius Caesar) have been autocratic rulers and (2) most well-known historical accomplishments are associated with authoritarian leaders (Amanchuwu, Stanley, & Nwachukwu, 2015; St. Thomas University, 2018). Many of these historical accomplishments—such as building railroad systems, operating giant steel mills, and numerous industrial achievements in the United States—were

developed under autocratic leaders (Chukwusa, 2019). In autocratic leadership, an individual imbued with power has complete control over decision-making with little or no input from subordinates.

Autocratic leaders employ authoritarian control over employees (Maqsood, Bilal, & Baig, 2013). Chukwusa (2019) noted that autocratic leadership could be useful in situations when rapid decision-making is needed. According to Fiore (2009), when faced with a decision, autocratic leaders may display specific characteristics such as maintaining high structure, taking full authority and control for completing a task, commanding all operations through directives, and seeking little input from subordinates. Autocratic leadership may lead to higher productivity in the short term, but lack of initiative and institutional squabble may occur in the long term. Another criticism of this leadership is that it can lead to resentment among staff (Amanchuwu et al., 2015).

**Bureaucratic leadership.** Bureaucratic leadership is associated with bureaucracy. Bureaucracies have existed since ancient times in societies like China and Egypt. They have persisted through the years to western and Arabic empires and the Vatican, up to and including modern bureaucracies (Sammier, 2015). Bureaucratic leadership is a style in which leaders follow the rules rigorously and ensure that followers strictly comply with regulations. This leadership style is valid for work that involves high levels of caution, such as working with toxic substances, heights, machinery, and organizations where job tasks are primarily conventional. However, bureaucratic leadership is not practical for organizations that rely on innovation and creativity (Amanchuwu et al., 2015). Criticisms of this leadership style include its emphasis on legal-rational values, possibly creating organizations in which people lose connection with values like effect and tradition, leading to an “iron cage of modernity.” Weber (1999) described the iron cage concept as

the increased rationalization inherent in social life, particularly when individuals feel trapped in a system based on specific phenomena. It is also possible for the iron law of oligarchy to occur in this system where the bureaucratic elite pursue their subordinates (Samier, 2015).

**Charismatic leadership.** Max Weber developed the charismatic leadership style based on his exploration of political obligation and why the state obeys. Weber (1922) identified three models of legitimacy: charisma, tradition, and legal-rational (as cited in Epley, 2015). Charisma is “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or exceptional powers or qualities” (Epley, 2015, p. 9). Charismatic leaders possess the attribute of charisma and inspire motivation among employees (Fragouli, 2019). The charismatic leader can articulate innovative visions and emphasize collective identity (Shastri, Mishra, & Sinha, (2010). Charismatic leadership is often used interchangeably with transformational leadership because of these similarities. The styles have been the subject of similar criticism, such as ambiguity in the definition due to the absence of a consistent definition of charismatic leadership (Mhatre & Riggio, 2014). The behaviors that characterize charismatic leadership are not clearly articulated. While this leadership style is viewed positively, many charismatic leaders are exploitative and behave in unethical manners (Yukl, 2012).

**Transformational leadership.** In a pioneering work on leadership, Burns (1978) provided a comprehensive assessment of leadership purpose and styles. Hinkin and Schriesheim (2006) much later noted that while there are many approaches to studying leadership, current leadership research is dominated by transformational-transactional leadership theory. Transformational leadership is a style in which people engage with one

another so that both leaders and followers experience higher levels of motivation and morality (Hearn, 2013; Northouse, 2004). Bass and Avolio (1990) organized this kind of leadership into the main orientations: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

*Idealized influence* indicates whether a leader makes invitational gestures that appeal to others' aspirations and dreams as it is essential to serve as a role model (Bass & Avolio, 1990). *Inspirational motivation* calculates and observes how the vision is provided and uses appropriate symbols and images to help others complete their work. The workers want the leader to see their work as significant (Bass & Avolio, 1990). *Intellectual stimulation* encourages others to become innovative in their ways of thinking and to look at old ways of operating through a new lens, providing hope and creating stimulating, nurturing environments with new possibilities. The idea is to encourage the employees to question their beliefs and values (Bass & Avolio, 1990). *Individualized consideration* is focused on the individual's well-being to the degree that individual assignments are provided and are focused on those less involved and those actively participating (Bass & Avolio, 1990, p. 26). The leader addresses the followers' needs, and questions listen to their concerns, and serve as mentors.

Transformational leaders encourage their followers by proffering a compelling vision while providing the necessary empowerment for action and serving as role models (Edmonds, 2009; Hearn, 2013; Littleford, 2007). The leader transforms his or her followers by creating meaningful tasks, motivating followers to focus on organizational goals rather than their interests, and activating followers' higher-order needs. Thus, transformational leadership results in followers striving for more exceptional personal and professional achievements and giving discretionary effort to their responsibilities

(Abdullah, Shamsuddin, & Wahab, 2015; Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015; Bass & Avolio, 1990).

In the educational setting, the transformational leadership model is focused on processes through which the principal works to influence school outcomes (Taylor-Backor, 2013). It is also focused on the capacities of the members of the school community and their commitments. Also, it involves dimensions such as modeling best practices and organizational values, providing support to teachers, establishing community goals, and building school vision (Bush, 2007). It requires full participation, a positive school environment and school culture, and high expectations for all community members—teachers and students alike (Bush, 2007). Transformational school leadership leads to high levels of teacher satisfaction and morale. People’s perceptions of meaning in the workplace are connected to their level of engagement and their performance (Holbeche & Springett, 2003), suggesting that people seek more meaning in their day-to-day work than they desire in their personal lives. This perception means that employers should aim to make work meaningful by finding out their employees’ values, especially since evidence suggests that meaningfulness impacts the individual and the bottom line (Holbeche & Springett, 2003).

This leadership model has significant criticisms, despite its popularity, mostly deriving from the premise that since administration does not occur in a vacuum, numerous internal and external organizational processes influence leadership processes and outcomes. Other criticism includes (1) ambiguity in the descriptions of transformational behaviors, which lowers construct validity, and (2) the fact that there has not been (at the time of this literature review) a systematic study of underlying theoretical influences. For instance, influence processes involving dyadic interactions over time lead

to outcomes like personal identification with an organization and rule compliance, but such rational methods have not been used to explain transformational leadership outcomes. Transformational leadership theory also fails to account for factors such as self-efficacy and optimism (Hildenbrand, Sacramento, & Binnewies, 2018; Yukl, 1999). Yukl (1999) noted that situational variables leading to transformational leadership's positive effects are not sufficiently acknowledged. Yukl (1999) also indicated that transformational leadership theories do not consider the alignment between organizational and personal goals as leaders may be biased and favor shareholders' interests versus followers' interests (Lee, 2014; Odumeru & Ifeanyi, 2013). Excessive levels of employee involvement can also lead to burnout (Hildenbrand et al., 2018).

**Transactional leadership.** Burns (1978) was the first to describe transactional leadership. According to Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2015), leaders employ a leadership style based on value exchange. Specifically, leaders who use this style apply conventional rewards and punishment to obtain compliance from workers or followers (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Hargis, Watt, & Piotrowski, 2011). The primary characteristics of transactional leadership are contingent reward (i.e., the leader provides rewards where followers perform adequately); passive management by exception (i.e., punishment and correction are used in response to unacceptable performance and to influence the behavior of followers); active management by exemption (i.e., the leader actively monitors followers' activities and applies corrective methods whenever work is not completed to set standards) (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Bush, 2007; Hearn, 2013). Common criticisms of transactional leadership are related to its processes and outcomes rather than its theoretical components. For example, with its focus on maintaining the status quo, transactional leadership is more effective in stable environments. Therefore, this

leadership style does not lead to desired results in the modern competitive setting where optimal performance and creativity are often essential to an organization (Mahdinezhad, Suandi, Silong, & Omar, 2013).

In the educational context, transactional leadership refers to a relationship between teachers and principals based on value exchange. According to Bush (2007), interactions between teachers and transactional leaders are episodic, rather than based on a sense of trust in the leader, and such communications are limited to transaction exchanges. There is no motivation, inspiration, or encouragement for anyone to rise to higher levels of achievement as we see in transformational leadership; instead, the principal's role is that of a leader who has authority over teachers, and this is based on the principal's position (Taylor-Backor, 2013). Although teachers maintain a certain level of performance under this form of leadership to avoid jeopardizing their employment and pay, there is no long-term commitment among teachers. They are not motivated to be innovative or apply discretionary effort. As a result, teacher morale can be low (Houchard, 2005; Littleford, 2007).

**Laissez-faire leadership.** The term *laissez-faire* is of French origin and loosely translated means “leave it alone” (St. Thomas University, 2018). Kurt Lewin, an early contributor to social psychology, is credited with developing the laissez-faire leadership concept. Lewin identified this leadership style as the opposite of autocratic leadership and the form of leadership requiring the lowest levels of managerial oversight (Rashid, Edmondson, & Leonard, 2013; St. Thomas University, 2018). This leadership style is characterized by leaders' indifference to workers' activities and performance. The laissez-faire leader adopts a “hands-off” approach to work processes and interactions, and many things are ignored, such as workers' needs, problems in the workplace, and employee

performance. Conflicts are also ignored, except for those situations where the leader has no choice but to address them (Edmonds, 2009).

Laissez-faire leaders also delegate responsibility to any person willing to take it and avoid decision-making and communication as much as possible. These leaders tend to avoid rewarding or punishing people (Edmonds, 2009; Northouse, 2004). As a result, their followers generally have low levels of motivation and little respect for the leader. This leadership style is not associated with positive intrinsic benefits and does not lead to increased job satisfaction or morale levels. Instead, this leadership style is associated with low morale, high absenteeism, low productivity, and high turnover (Edmonds, 2009; Northouse, 2004).

Critics of laissez-faire leadership have noted that it is risky to delegate decision-making responsibility to staff members. Critics have also argued that this leadership style is best suited for higher organizational hierarchy levels where individuals are already experts. However, proponents believe that laissez-faire leadership can create positive change, similarly to the transformative leadership model. Compared to transformational and transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership has received far less attention in the literature. However, the fact that laissez-faire leadership leads to negative employee relationships made it essential in the current study to provide a potentially balanced view of the effects of leadership style on teacher morale (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008).

## **Understanding and Exploring Teacher Morale**

### **Defining Teacher Morale**

According to Houchard (2005), the concept of morale has received insufficient attention within academic and research communities. However, given the myriad of societal issues that influence successful teaching in modern society, understanding the



concept of morale and factors affecting it and ways to measure it is very important (Blackburn, 2015). Understanding morale is vital to understanding historical and ongoing debates regarding teacher morale, particularly in the United States. Morale is an intangible element that is hard to define or describe. It is also difficult to measure, since it is influenced by such diverse factors (Houchard, 2005; Rauf et al., 2013), and many different definitions exist in the literature.

Ahmad et al. (2001) defined morale as “the degree to which an employee feels good about his or her work and work environment” (p. 467). Edmonds (2009) defined morale as one’s mental and emotional conditions relative to a task or goal and further described it as the extent to which an individual’s needs are satisfied. Thomas (1997) defined job satisfaction, job attitudes, and morale synonymously in describing teachers’ feelings about their jobs and their performance due to the school’s climate, which a principal augments based on their leadership traits. Houchard (2005) noted that the principal leadership style, which is essential to a school’s success, positively or negatively affects teacher morale. However, a person typically controls his or her morale. Therefore, since workplace experiences can be satisfactory or unpleasant, work morale can also be high or low. When morale is high, it manifests as enthusiasm in the job, while low morale is evidenced by little interest and enthusiasm. Rauf et al. (2013) described morale as involving three factors: rationality (the similarity between goals of the workers and organizational goals), identification or recognition from the organization, and belongingness (positive relationships with coworkers).

Devi and Vijayakumar (2016) proffered three approaches to morale as social, classical, and psychological. In the social strategy, morale represents the tendency for an individual or group members to be enthusiastic about common goals. It indicates the

degree to which there is a perception that the individual or group members' motives will be satisfied through group processes. Morale in the classical approach is a job-related attitude related to background conditions like feelings of happiness, individual effort and contribution in group settings, and the absence of conflict. Morale in the psychological approach is the mental attitude that enables accepting the group's goals over individual goals. Psychologically, morale represents a total of psychic qualities like resolution, confidence, courage, and fortitude. Tsang and Liu (2016) defined teacher morale in communication-related terms, which is explained as the balance between instructional and non-instructional tasks, and teacher perceptions of meaningfulness.

According to Devi and Vijayakumar (2016), positive teacher morale as evidenced by behaviors such as eagerness to come to work early and to leave work late. Other evidence of positive morale includes active participation in school committees, support for school programs, interest in the school's direction, support for school-community efforts, and pride in being an educator. High teacher morale is usually associated with high school initiatives (Littleford, 2007). Rafferty (2002) noted that low morale could lead to teachers' insecurity, lack of confidence, frustration, confusion, fear of supervision, resistance to change, and high absenteeism rates. Teachers who have low morale may also display negative behaviors such as open hostility, back-biting, lack of consideration for others, and forming cliques with colleagues. As a result of such negative effects, low morale is a significant factor in teacher turnover (Littleford, 2007; Rafferty, 2002).

The term morale is often used interchangeably with motivation; however, it is important to differentiate between them. Motivation is defined as a cluster of psychological or internal processes that initiate, sustain, and guide goal-oriented behavior. Morale, on the other hand, is the effective and collective reaction to

organizational climate and culture. Motivation operates largely in the individual domain, while morale is particularly significant in domains where collective energy is essential to success, where teacher morale impacts the school (Organizational Performance Group, 2016).

### **Historical Development of Teacher Morale**

We must understand the historical context of teacher morale in the United States as people from evolving societal, economic, and cultural backgrounds have played crucial roles in shaping the teaching profession and teachers' experiences. The earliest teachers in the United States were highly empowered—they ran their classrooms and schoolhouses and were able to exercise almost complete autonomy (Andersen, Heinesen, & Pedersen, 2014; Klassen & Chiu, 2011). They benefited from working within and for the benefit of communities with which they were already familiar. Yet teacher morale began to decrease towards the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century when the combined forces of urbanization and immigration challenged the context with which teachers were already familiar (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Since 1995, teacher morale has been substantially improved by two forces: stronger teacher unionization and education training (Dewey, 2013). As a result, teaching has been increasingly recognized as a profession that requires careful training and preparation in pedagogy and subject-matter expertise and classroom management, and other aspects of managing student behavior (Rousmaniere, 2013). This professionalization of teaching resulted in the development of cohorts of teachers who entered their professions with more knowledge and preparation than teachers entered with in the past. These newer teachers had higher morale levels because they were better prepared for the job (Rousmaniere, 2013). Teacher unions' strengthening increased

morale by leading to higher teacher salaries, teacher protection from arbitrary and unfair firings, and more institutional power to the profession, which it lacked for many decades (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Recent events in education that have direct implications in teacher morale include introducing reform efforts, such as the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind legislation, which emphasized student achievement standardization. During both the NCLB and ESSA eras, teacher morale has been challenged by a stronger focus on students' standardized test performance as a determinant of not only school funding but also of teacher performance (Block, 2015; Croft, Roberts, & Stenhouse, 2015; Okitowamba, Julie, & Mbekwa, 2018; Plank & Condliffe, 2013). Standardized testing can, in theory, create a means for evaluating teachers based on student improvement as measured from year to year, accounting for other covariates. However, this data-driven method of teacher assessment challenged teacher morale. Under NCLB legislation, principals had to decide about teaching, hiring, and school climate, which required rapid, data-driven teacher assessment methods. The use of standardized test scores gave many principals a quick (but possibly unreliable and invalid) means of identifying the best teachers. However, teachers have argued that their teaching quality should not necessarily be subject to statistical assessment and measurement. Given the developmental effects teachers have on students across the entire span of a person's life, they have no control over students' actual learning abilities in immediate terms (Block, 2015; Croft et al., 2015; Glover, Reddy, Kettler, Kurz, & Lekwa, 2016; Lewis & Hardy, 2015).

### **Factors that Influence Teacher Morale**

Teacher morale is a vital component of the current study, and it is influenced by various factors, such as stress, school culture, workplace characteristics, unmet needs,

and job satisfaction. The principal's role should include creating a conducive climate for learning, supporting and empowering teachers, and reducing factors that interfere with the teacher's performance.

**Stress.** Stress is a significant factor in teacher morale (Edmonds, 2009). Lumsden (1998) noted that stress could cause emotional and physical fatigue and lower levels of motivation, involvement, satisfaction, enthusiasm, and productivity. The modern teaching environment is complex, with teacher morale in the United States being heavily affected by changing school contexts, demographics, and communities (Andersen et al., 2014). In the post-NCLB and post-ESSA eras, teacher morale has been affected by the focus on standardized test scores for purposes of school funding as well as teacher-performance evaluations (Au, 2007; Block, 2015; Croft et al., 2015; Lewis & Hardy, 2015). Teachers have long argued that their influence on students is lifelong, developmental, and often subtle, further asserting that a good teacher's impact on students is not measurable via changes in students' test scores.

Teacher morale is also affected by the changing economics of education. As school tax revenues stagnate in many parts of the country, many schools lack the budgets to hire new teachers, ensure that teachers get raises or performance bonuses, or compensate teachers in a manner commensurate with their ability and experience (Blair & Staley, 1995). While many teachers may not be motivated by financial concerns, dwindling school budgets still lead to challenges, resulting in consequences affecting teacher morale. Due to budget constraints, teachers sometimes lack the resources to explore student engagement, which can innovatively lower teacher morale.

A changing school-safety climate is another factor that affects teacher morale. The phenomenon of school shootings, for instance, which has intensified since the 1990s, has

created a genuine safety concern for both teachers and students (Lickel, Schmader, & Hamilton, 2003). Teachers are increasingly reporting to work worried about their physical safety and their students' safety. Also, societal problems (e.g., crime, poverty, poor health, breakdown of the family unit, unemployment) are spilling into the school system. This spillover makes teaching more complex as teachers struggle to navigate issues affecting their students' learning and behavior (Houchard, 2005; Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa 2000).

Teacher expectations are exponentially expanding due to heavier workloads related to teaching testing-specific content while teachers are also serving as mentors and frontline social workers for students (Houchard, 2005; Whitaker et al., 2000). Classroom teachers are under pressure to ensure that students make adequate yearly gains while teaching students with different learning needs (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005). The MetLife 2012 Survey not only revealed that teachers' satisfaction was at its lowest since 1985, but it showed a 13% increase in teacher stress from 1985 to 2010 (Blackburn, 2015; Houchard, 2005). While hard work can cause teacher fatigue, such fatigue may be cured with rest. Stress, however, is more enduring and can lead to interpersonal problems. Additionally, issues such as health problems, lowered resilience, depleted emotional reserves, overdependence on substances (e.g., alcohol, coffee, sleep aids), and poor performance affect teachers (Houchard, 2005; Littleford, 2007).

**School culture.** Culture refers to the set of values, norms, and beliefs held by members of an organization. These standards determine how the organization members ascribe meaning to events and how they behave and treat each other. In the current study, school culture is defined as the beliefs, traditions, and norms characterizing a school. School culture includes the ways people in the school system treat each other and the

extent to which they feel appreciated and involved in that community (Blackburn, 2015). School culture has a powerful influence on teacher morale, and a positive school culture leads to high teacher morale. School cultures that include information sharing, networking, a positive learning environment, a supportive administration, professional collaboration, teamwork, and congeniality all support high levels of teacher morale. School cultures that lack such elements tend to foster low teacher morale (Blackburn, 2015; Littleford, 2007).

**Workplace characteristics.** Workplace or job satisfaction includes both intrinsic and extrinsic features. Intrinsic features include qualities such as autonomy and meaningfulness, while irrelevant parts are factors such as salary and benefits—intrinsic characteristics influence job satisfaction (Ayele, 2014). Researchers have also found that intrinsic work characteristics—such as a sense of achievement, meaningfulness, and autonomy—can be more important to workers than supervision, pay, and relationship with coworkers. However, such findings do not minimize effective leadership on job satisfaction (Küskü, 2003; She-Cheng & Lin, 2011).

Similarly, low salary is, on its own, a significant contributor to low morale among teachers (Rauf et al., 2013). Several factors can negatively influence teacher morale, such as lack of professional autonomy, fear of increasing workload, increased accountability, growing demands from the institution, poor salary, and teacher quality related to students' behavior and learning. Besides, teacher morale may have been affected by external factors such as government policies, personal relationships, and teachers' health (Rauf et al., 2013).

**Unmet needs.** Houchard (2005) noted that motivational theories could explain the influence of unmet needs on teacher morale: When teachers have unsatisfied needs, their

morale may be lowered. The unsatisfied needs support Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which includes the premise that satisfaction of different work conditions is a vital source of work motivation and that people are indeed motivated by unsatisfied needs. According to Maslow's hierarchy, there are five levels of needs: physiological conditions (e.g., food, air, shelter, clothing), safety needs (e.g., physical safety, job security, financial stability, robust security), social needs (e.g., love, care, affection), esteem needs (e.g., achievement, freedom, self-respect, recognition, attention), and self-actualization (e.g., need to achieve goals, fulfill potential, and acquire knowledge) (Ayele, 2014). Houchard (2005) noted that the extent of the fulfillment of teachers' needs corresponds with their morale level.

**Job satisfaction.** While unmet needs may influence teachers' satisfaction and morale, we must also understand job satisfaction as an independent variable in teacher morale. Numerous factors can lower teachers' satisfaction levels and, consequently, morale. Job satisfaction is an emotional state, usually positive or pleasurable, resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Himli, Ali, & Nihal, 2016). Job satisfaction is also described as a worker's effective response towards his or her job based on comparing expected outcomes and actual outcomes (Shahzad, Mumtaz, Hayat, & Khan, 2010). Job satisfaction is similar to employee satisfaction, except that it covers satisfaction from the worker's perspective regarding needs and feelings (Küskü, 2003; Shahzad et al., 2010). This emotional state is determined by the work environment, pay, and the nature of the job itself.

Like morale, Himli et al. (2016) noted that motivation theories could explain job satisfaction. Historically, research on job satisfaction began in the early 20th century with the theory of Taylorism or scientific management (as proposed by Frederick W. Taylor in



1911). Following a scientific method, Taylor explained that productivity is improved. The use of the scientific method in management leads to maximum employee productivity by providing innovative training employees. Findings from the Hawthorne Studies are related to human nature; these scholars found that many factors contribute to motivation and employee satisfaction, including morale, effective management, and positive interrelationships. In addition to the importance of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory with job satisfaction (Khan, Khan, Nawaz, & Qureshi, 2010), Nawab and Bhatti (2011) also conceptualized job satisfaction as a function of motivators based on Herzberg's theory.

Herzberg's theory proffers two sets of factors as influencing work attitudes: hygiene factors and motivators. The hygiene factors or maintenance factors (such as organizational policies, workers' rights, good interpersonal relations, salary structures, employee support, fairness, benefits, safe working environment, and job security) promote motivation but do not lead to long-term satisfaction. Motivators or satisfiers, on the other hand, do lead to long-lasting satisfaction. Motivators are autonomy, job meaningfulness, personal advancement, involvement, participation, responsibility, and ownership (Himli et al., 2016). Supporting these positions, She-Cheng and Lin (2011) noted that the work environment, a sense of community or belongingness, and relationships with co-workers are essential predictors of job satisfaction.

The literature shows that job-satisfaction theories have been grouped by their appearance or the theories' nature. Nature-based grouping involves content theories (Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Alderfer's Existence Relatedness and Growth (ERG) theory, McClelland's theory of needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory) and process theories (reinforcement theory, expectancy theory, behavior modification, goal setting theory,

equity theory, and cognitive evaluation theory) (Khan et al., 2010), all of which are theories of motivation.

As previously noted, the link between job satisfaction and morale is highlighted (Edmonds, 2009) in a description of morale as the extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied, with the degree of such satisfaction thought to be derived from job satisfaction. According to a United States Department of Education survey, 49% of teachers leave the profession because of job dissatisfaction. Employee satisfaction encompasses both comfortable with the scope of work and the worker's attitude toward the work environment. However, workers' decisions can be based on partial satisfaction. For instance, some teachers stay in a job if they feel satisfied with the work environment, even if they are dissatisfied with compensation (Küskü, 2003). Other factors that affect job satisfaction include national culture, relationships, and health status, all of which are outside this study's scope.

Fortunately, job satisfaction can increase morale as well as reduce negative work behaviors like apathy and turnover. Job satisfaction and morale have a positive relationship as people with high job satisfaction levels usually have high morale. These people are also motivated to engage in activities that increase their job satisfaction and lead to high morale (Rauf et al., 2013). Although job satisfaction and morale are both states of mind, they are not the same. Job satisfaction is a response to the prevailing situation and is present-oriented. Past events guide morale, but the determining factor references anticipated events as future-oriented (Rauf et al., 2013).

### **Principals' Influence on Teacher Morale**

According to Roelen, Koopmans, and Groothoff (2008), the principal is one of the single most important factors in establishing teacher morale (Roelen et al., 2008). Certain

leadership practices can promote teacher morale, such as rapport with principals, professionalism, positive interpersonal relationships in the school context, and effective communication; principals are responsible for engaging in such practices as part of their normal function (Roelen et al., 2008). Many education researchers have found that working conditions and positive work environments are critical to teacher satisfaction and retention in addition to programs that indicate strong leadership support, such as mentoring programs (Lynch, 2012).

Blackburn (2015) noted that principals who encourage staff collaboration while demonstrating appreciation for their teachers could boost teacher morale. Teachers experience high morale when principals foster positive work environments. Teachers also enjoy their jobs when they feel a sense of accomplishment and feel a good working relationship stemming from the principal uniting the staff. If teachers feel that the principal is not supportive in their leadership, their negative emotions can lead to burnout, stress, commitment problems, and self-efficacy loss. However, this emotional side of leadership is often neglected in extant research (Lambersky, 2016).

### **The Principal's Role in Providing Leadership**

The principal is the highest authority within a school and, as such, the school leader. The principal is responsible for overseeing all of the school's staff's performance and assuring that the school, through judicious and effective use of available resources, performs at a high level (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005). As Gülcan (2012) noted, "School administrators should possess the characteristics of a leader more than a manager to reach the organizational goals" (p. 626). To achieve education-related goals, school leaders must play several roles (Gülcan, 2012). In recent years, school leaders' expectations have begun to transcend managerial duties, including improving school

performance. Cuban (1988) stated that effective school leaders must find equilibrium between managerial, political, and instructional roles.

Principal leadership, as a unique construct, can be understood using the framework of general leadership theories. At the individual level of leadership theory, principals' leadership qualities are not necessarily the reflection of inborn traits (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; McKinney et al., 2015), but instead, the sum of behaviors that can be underpinned and supported by feelings and cognitions (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; Lambersky, 2016; Yang, 2014).

Two important themes in the principal leadership literature are distributed leadership versus hierarchical leadership at the organizational levels. The definition of distributed leadership in principal leadership theory is somewhat variable. Spillane and Diamond (2007) noted that some use distributed leadership synonymously with democratic or participative leadership. Also, distributed leadership is characterized by a setting where different people can take on the role or roles at different times and in different ways.

The literature suggests that some aspects of distributive leadership have been built into the principal's office's institutional definition in the United States from the 19th century onward. For instance, Rousmaniere (2013) noted that the principal's office was created for functional management, not dictatorial teacher oversight. The strengthening of teachers' unions in the 20th century also integrated distributive leadership into some principal functions (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015). By contrast, a hierarchical leadership structure is one in which the principal is the sole authoritarian leader who governs subordinates' actions in a top-down fashion (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008). In the contemporary practice of educational leadership by principals,

some of the principal's leadership functions are hierarchical, whereas, in other contexts, the principal might employ distributed leadership (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; Lambersky, 2016).

In a professional context, the competencies involved in principal leadership are in alignment with those of general leadership, including service, adaptability, self-confidence, optimism, empathy, emotional self-awareness, conflict management, serving as a change catalyst, developing others, collaboration, communication, influence, inspiration, vision, and organizational awareness (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005). Some of these competencies are outlined in various professional performance standards developed for school principals in the United States.

Under NCLB and ESSA legislation, many public schools in America have closed their doors due to schools' failure to meet standards. This failure reflects primarily on principals. In this environment, many principals, especially those at schools serving communities of color and high poverty areas, are concerned about their ability to ensure that their schools perform well enough to retain funding (Block, 2015; Croft et al., 2015; Glover et al., 2016; Lewis & Hardy, 2015; Okitowamba et al., 2018). Again, such performance reflects on the principal, irrespective of whether the principal has no control over children's learning abilities from diverse backgrounds. An essential effect of NCLB and ESSA legislation on principal leadership is the reorientation of leadership away from longer-term, softer, and more abstract forms toward types of leadership more likely to result in short-term performance.

While principals of schools with higher levels of achievement—which are often schools with larger proportions of white students and schools in wealthier areas—might not have to exercise a standards-driven form of leadership, other principals have had to

recalibrate their leadership toward the sole objective of increasing measurable academic achievement. In this environment, principals might have to exercise more hierarchical power and engage in forms of leadership not necessarily designed to foster relationships and inspire followers but instead to lead to higher test scores (Block, 2015; Croft et al., 2015; Glover et al., 2016; Witte et al., 2014). In the current examination of principal leadership styles, these developments in the educational system and their consequences for both principal leadership styles and teacher morale are significant to our understanding of the topic both within the context of the specific district and in the larger context of the United States.

### **The Relationship between Principal Leadership and Teacher Morale**

Research shows effective leadership as the most critical factor in staff morale (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005). A principal is responsible for how well the school environment functions. While morale is personal to a teacher, a positive learning and teaching environment is central to its development and maintenance (Hearn, 2013). Therefore, teacher morale can be cultivated, nurtured, and enhanced through a principal's leadership practices (Jolley, 2016; Lambersky, 2016; Whitaker et al., 2000).

Principals must be responsible for cultivating high teacher morale, along with relationships within the school. Effective principal leadership facilitates shared vision among all school members, facilitates a psychologically healthy and conducive school culture conducive to learning and teaching, ensures a safe environment, and displays ethics when collaborating with other community members (Edmonds, 2007; Lambersky, 2016). Effective school leaders also proactively promote equity and use effective communication. An effective leader engages teachers in reflective dialogue while involving them in decision-making processes. Such characteristics empower teachers,

boost their morale, and promote school success (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; Edmonds, 2007; Whitaker et al., 2000). Similarly, leadership behaviors that target teachers directly—such as showing interest in their work, supporting them, creating opportunities for their professional growth, and facilitating their autonomy and self-direction—also contribute to teacher morale (Edmonds, 2007; Koerner, 1990; Whitaker et al., 2000).

The literature supports the positive relationship between principal leadership style and teacher morale. Lambersky (2016) examined the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale, self-efficacy, commitment, and stress in Ontario, Canada, using a sample of 20 secondary school teachers from 16 different schools. In evaluating the effectiveness of transformational leadership, Lambersky concluded that this form of leadership encompasses supportive and complementary attention given to students' and teachers' affective and emotional needs. This approach encourages and motivates ways to meet the expectations and challenging demands teachers encounter (Lambersky, 2016). Lambersky thus offered crucial support for the positive influence of transformational leadership on teacher morale. Although Lambersky (2016) supported this claim, there were gaps in the study: (1) Because no precise definition of transformational leadership guided the study Lambersky, it is not clear that the evidence refers to transformational leadership or some other type; (2) The construct of teacher morale was not developed systematically.

An examination of the relationship between transformational leadership and self-efficacy (Jolley, 2016) was a relevant empirical precursor for the current study insofar as its findings indicate clear links between self-efficacy and morale. Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “a generative capability in which cognitive, social, emotional, and

behavioral subskills organized and effectively orchestrated to serve many purposes” (pp. 36–37). Self-efficacy is directly related to the exercise of skill and the experience of autonomy, both of which are essential to morale. The teachers in Jolley’s qualitative study, who self-identified as having high self-efficacy levels, described this orientation as the teachers considering themselves good teachers and enjoying the freedom to teach. However, a key finding was that transformational leadership influences teachers’ self-efficacy through four mechanisms: “creativity, professional development, vicarious experience, and vision” (Jolley, 2016, p. 89). One limitation of Jolley (2016) was that the four mechanisms identified were based solely on principals’ orientations. One of the barriers was the conflation of mechanisms of influence with the nature of transformational leadership itself.

Bass and Avolio (1990) have already provided both a theory and an empirical prediction about the nature of transformational leadership’s effectiveness; this form of leadership is effective because of a combination of influence, motivation, stimulation, and consideration, which Bass and Avolio (1990) inferred through statistical factor analysis (p. 23). Research within the paradigm of transformational leadership theory can vary depending on the quality and quantity of evidence. Also, researchers often anticipate that (a) transformational leadership is active; and (b) transformational leadership is likely to be effective because of transformational leaders’ ability to combine the orientations of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Bass and Avolio (1999) suggested that transformational leadership is primarily emotional in its impact. In other words, transformational leaders are useful because they can communicate emotion to and amplify feeling within their subordinates. This emotion explains subordinates’ individual decisions to work harder and better than



before. Bass and Avolio (1990) also suggested that transformational leaders are behavioral models for their subordinates and are useful because of their appeal to cognition. Thus, within the paradigm of transformational leadership theory itself, there appears to be support for at least three transmission mechanisms—emotional, behavioral (specifically, social-cognitive), and intellectual tools—of influence from the transformational leader to his or her subordinates.

### **An Historic Look at Race in Education**

Historically, race has always played a role in American society and the educational system. Structurally, race determined the level of fairness and quality of education available for and afforded to a person. As early as 1680, slave codes indicated that Blacks were not allowed to be educated (Harris, 1993). Racial classification was given to Whites; however, Blacks were not entitled to the government's free and appropriate education. Once slavery was abolished in 1865 with the ratification and enactment of the 13th Amendment, Blacks were legally allowed to attend schools. Despite the progression, schools were segregated by race. Segregation and inequality still operated within education's fibers—the Board of Education versus The Civil Rights Movement. *Brown* brought an end to the de jure practice of separate and unequal schooling.

However, de facto segregation persisted until 2011 within states, counties, cities, communities, schools, and classrooms. As it relates to the legal construction of race, Haney-Lopez (2006) contributed his work and found that, according to the constitution, only those people identified as White was entitled to have full rights and access to U.S. citizenship. White Americans were recognized as citizens with a legal identity, while non-Whites were identified as aliens. Naturalization and acclimatization rights were tied

to land and marriage ownership, which led to economic advantage and prestige, personal safety. Thus, it was made possible for Whites to be productive citizens without the same obstacles, limited opportunities, and barriers experienced by non-Whites (Haney-Lopez, 2006). Whites were known for being knowledgeable, industrious, law-abiding, and virtuous, while Blacks were considered criminals, lazy, ignorant, and lascivious (Haney-Lopez, 2006).

The study of anti-racist education is an important topic. It seeks to establish and authorize race's eminence in understanding its relationship and role in the school system. George Sefa Dei (1996) outlined several fundamental principles of anti-racist education. He reiterated that educators must recognize the importance of race factors concerning other forms of social oppression and injustice, generating the advantage and the disadvantage. Educators must understand that students possess racial identities, and the school is not known for traditionally being viewed as a racially neutral site. Dei (1996) stated that there is a scholastic and instructive need to confront and address differences. Dei said it is important not to assume or take for granted a problem's origin and roots and to understand student issues within the intricacies of their circumstances. Yet, Alastair Bonnett (2000) investigated anti-racist educational practice, which revealed an inclination towards psychological approaches that attempt to engage the beliefs and cultures .

The racial context was particularly crucial for this study, given its implications. African American teachers navigate an educated workforce influenced by longstanding social, political, systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014). Accordingly, one of the study goals was to explore whether the principals' leadership styles incorporated anti-racism techniques. As a

leadership practice, anti-racism involves consciously restructuring practices and attitudes to ensure power is equal among all teachers. It also includes publicly recognizing African American teachers and their White counterparts who exemplify a commitment to shared values. Lastly, it involves supporting African American teachers' decisions on their own, rather than suppressing their views and ideas.

### **A Glimpse into African American Schools**

#### **What is Anti-racism?**

Anti-racism is an active process of identifying and eliminating racism by implementing systematic changes to organizational structures, procedures, policies, practices, and attitudes to redistribute power equally (McIntosh, 1988). Kendie (2019) adds that anti-racism is deeply rooted in individuals' actions to eradicate racism in individuals and institutions' lives.

Educational systems play a vital role in analyzing, transforming, and critiquing practices. Our understanding of how we come to establish and view the world (Giroux, 1983) makes it easy to comprehend that schools are in a position where racism and stereotypes against minority groups are advanced. If that is the case, then the advancement and responsiveness against racism should be promoted in schools (Kailin, 2005). This cycle and reproduction avert schools from providing an education based on equity and justice. Anti-racism education aims to develop strategic techniques that challenge racial, linguistic oppression and ethnicity through educational philosophies and practices in all schools and communities.

Also, anti-racism education aims to form skills, knowledge, and abilities within the school body that address the students, teachers, staff, and community members, so everyone will have the tools needed to contribute to constructing an equitable society.

According to Kailin (2005), the anti-racism education would be accomplished if the plan included the scrutiny and disparity of slavery, immigration policies and laws, unfair relations of the stratified order of power, assumptions and negative attitudes about race, institutional racism, racial stereotypes, discrimination, and colonialism. Anti-racism education could get stuck in the exposition of cultural and racial diversity as tradition and not confront the asymmetrical race relations promoted by power structures when the educational framework does not address the question to reduce domination and implement a simplistic way that diminishes its theory and to incorporate diverse perspectives and materials to be all-inclusive for underrepresented groups (Gorski, 2008).

When the concerns and issues of race, racism, and inequality are present, race relations seem to absent from the school system plan and the educational model; diversity remains reduced to the students, staff, and community members when addressing multiculturalism as mere cultural tourism. Rather, the decision to discuss the issues should depend on the condition encountered daily. Pollock (2006) adds that everyday anti-racism in education requires educators to make strategic and self-conscious decisions to address the ingrained (racist) tendencies. Pollock (2006) warns that to have a preconceived idea about when it is appropriate to talk about race or not confront, it might be harmful because it might not suit real-world situations. To be able to identify these instances, teachers need to work on identifying "everyday racism." Pollock (2006) claims that everyday anti-racism requires educators to make intentional and strategic decisions to self-conscious and self-evaluate behaviors to counteract racist tendencies deeply rooted in individuals' hearts and minds (Pollock, 2006).

The first step that involves anti-racism in education is to reject false concepts, and notions of human differences and racial identities are not a genetic reality. Second, she

states that it is critical to acknowledge lived experiences related to the racial divide. Third, educators must understand and build upon diversity to bring justice to racialized groups that have suffered from negative classifications. Fourth, educators must be prepared to combat opposition and inequality among racialized groups and discuss the privileges that some groups have and some groups' disadvantages. Pollock suggests that these four steps might seem contradictory. However, if applied according to a specific context and the particular situation of a person, the efforts can be successful. For example, Pollock shared that being Black has both negative and positive experiences, such as being historically oppressed and experiences limited opportunities and the positive connotation such as bonding and being resilient in a Black community where oppression was prevalent (Pollock, 2006). Weinberg (1992) borrows from W.E.B. Du Bois commented when he shared that teachers were not educated by race and racism because of limited educational reform.

Conversely, Blacks have been taught to follow the mainstream's racist discourse, which results in the reproduction of racist beliefs in schools. The challenge of addressing racist discourse would be harder for White teachers than teachers of color because their identities and social construction have differed from those of Blacks (Howard, 2006). It was difficult for Whites to relate to people of color because of the limited interactions. Howard (2006) borrows from Nieto (1999) and Sleeter (2014) by saying that too often, White teachers are part of multicultural settings, which are realities that are not consistent with their truths, socialization patterns, views of the world, life experiences and the development of racial identity. In many instances, race-related conversations derail because people do not use the terms differently and interchangeably. One of the challenges of effectively communicating the topic of race is moving people from narrow,

precise, and individualized definitions of racism to a more systematic and comprehensive awareness plan. To illuminate racism and promote anti-racism, we need to name it, frame it, and explain it. “The only way to undo racism is to identify and describe it consistently — and then dismantle it (Kendi, 2019). That is the essence of anti-racism: the action must follow both emotional and intellectual awareness of racism. issue

### **African American Teachers in Today’s Schools**

African American teachers are currently under-represented in both public schools and education in general (Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein, & Mayfield, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2010), African Americans make up 12% of the general population. Still, teachers from this group are only approximately 8% of the public school teaching force. The problem of African American teacher under-representation compounds the fact that this group has higher attrition and turnover rates than teachers of other ethnicities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The literature clearly shows the value that African American teachers add to schools, students, and communities, including better outcomes for black students, increased commitment to social justice, and bridge-building via cultural and community knowledge (Acosta, 2015; Flores, Claeys, & Gist, 2018; Gist, 2018). However, long-standing social, political, systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement have shaped the current educational workforce (Sleeter, Neal, & Kumashiro, 2014). Across the landscape of education, researchers have identified substantive differences in the preparation of African American teachers, the characteristics of the schools where they work, and why they leave the profession compared to teachers of other ethnicities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Various studies have found that teachers of color not only have lower pass rates in

training programs (Petchauer, 2016), but they are also not supported in teacher-training programs (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). As research indicates, the root of the problem starts in the training process, outside of the current study's scope.

According to the State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce (2016), African American teachers leave the teaching profession rapidly. Some of the most commonly cited reasons they leave include inadequate preparation, limited professional development, poor relationships with school leaders and administrators, hostile racial climates, restrictive curriculum, race-related micro-aggressions, and fewer opportunities for leadership and career advancement (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2018; Gist, 2018; Philip, 2013; Quinones, 2018). As previously addressed in this review, these factors can lead to low morale, which may manifest as poor attendance, low levels of job satisfaction and performance, and burnout.

Although African American teachers are likely to stay in schools with African American students, teacher attrition is still higher than that of other groups (Gist, 2018). It is even higher at charter schools (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). Higher attrition rates may stem from them being more negatively impacted by the factors that lead to low morale. For instance, they get lower evaluation ratings than other subgroups of teachers and are less likely to be hired by school administrators. They are also over-represented in job terminations due to school closures (Gist, 2018). Again, existing literature has indicated that these factors can lead to low morale. Such problems raise questions regarding the role of the school leader in boosting and retaining African American teachers' morale. Gist (2018) noted that although we now have many diversity initiatives focused on recruiting teachers of color, including African American teachers, such programs have paid less attention to the types of support teachers are given when they

enter school districts as teachers. This oversight in the school context has led to a revolving door in which African American teachers exit faster than white teachers (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). School leaders are responsible for human resources policies that support African American teachers' professional growth and all others. Given the current state of teacher diversity in the United States and the need for more African American teachers, we must understand the impact of leadership style on teacher morale.

### **African American Leaders in Today's Schools**

The dynamics of race and school leadership have long been recognized as perpetuating a power imbalance. However, there appears to be hesitation in the American education system to address the notion that diversity in the student populations demands variety in leadership. Aligning, the two could contribute to the disruption of systemic practices that continue to marginalize black teachers and students and enable all of those involved to reach their full potential (Brown, 2005). Research on black education leaders continues to be sparse, with much of the literature focused on black superintendents, not on the leadership styles and practices of black administrators at school sites in principal and assistant principal roles. However, the research demonstrates differences in leadership between black and white school leaders, which can be useful in leveraging practices that support black and white students (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007, p. 756).

In a study of black school leadership, Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) found three defining factors present among black school leaders, and the leadership they discussed include differentiation of leadership, responsibilities between male and female leaders, recognition of black school leaders as mentors, and role models for African American students. Also, there was a pervasive fear that white leaders at the district level and the school level were not committed to black students (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). The



authors addressed how black leaders' practices are perceived to diverge along gender lines, resulting in male leaders being seen as more authoritative and female leaders being seen as moral compasses at school sites. Overall, black leaders assume the role of advocate more often than their white peers, not only for students but also for their black peers in leadership positions at other sites.

A critical component of black leadership is their perceptions of district leaders, who are overwhelmingly white. Black school leaders are more likely to insist on “putting on a good face” for visiting district-level administrators than their white counterparts. The authors believed this could have been due to the finding that they visit sites led by black administrators, primarily for punitive reasons (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007, p. 762). These practices shape the ways black leaders are perceived by African American teachers and the school community, resulting in the perpetuation of the power imbalance that created this lack of black representation in both teaching and administrative roles.

### **Anti-Racism Leadership**

What does anti-racism look like in our country? An anti-racism leader recognizes that racism isolates and makes power inaccessible to Black people and other school people. The leader is alert to unequal outcomes since he knows that race or culture neutral policies are not enough to level opportunities across cultural, racial, and linguistic groups. The anti-racism leader should work on building a strong moral foundation. These are difficult times, yes. But the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “The time is always right to do what is right.” With that perspective, the anti-racism leader works to dismantle racism. The leader also supports and shares power with the employees, especially those who have been deemed “minorities.” In that aspect, the anti-racism leader strengthens a

sense of belonging and encourages contributions from across the organization, helping to make the organization a place of equity and excellence.

To impact an anti-racism leader, the leader must abandon the idea of merely being good and start *doing* good. It is not enough to say (or think): “I am a good person because I do not speak nasty racial epithets.” I call this kind of position “non-racism” leadership. It is a passive stance in both language and practice that demands no action to dismantle inequitable systems. Another typical non-racism response is this: “I need to be good at this equity work before I can start doing it.” For example, a non-racism leader hears an individual in the n-word but decides to do nothing. I am doing good means that a person starts engaging in eradicating the perception and mindset. The work begins even if individuals do not feel comfortable address racial issues and bigotry statements. It is important that individuals stand up and challenge other a mindset of positive changes.

The concept of anti-racism leadership extends beyond a leader, simply supporting teachers and initiating diversity initiatives. Instead, anti-racism leadership in education refers to leaders addressing the systemic issues maintaining racism and inequality in schools. Brown (2004) noted that “effective leaders take responsibility for their learning, share a vision for what can be, assess their assumptions and beliefs, and understand the structural and organic nature of schools” (p. 78). Through leadership practices that support diversity and challenge the institution itself, anti-racism leaders actively drive change and refuse to accept an imbalanced distribution of power in their schools, districts, and communities. The concept of anti-racism leadership is inextricably interconnected. Anti-racist leadership and social justice are the forces that drive the abolition of such power imbalances.

Social justice's conscious and continuous exercise as a tenet of anti-racism leadership requires action beyond a leader simply exhibiting good morals and ethical leadership. As Bogotch (2014) noted, "Social justice, as a deliberate intervention, is different from good teaching and moral leadership" (p. 52). This conscious action, consisting of deliberate and motivated efforts to change the system, is recognized by the experiences of members of the school community, not merely by good intentions or an expressed desire to implement best practices (Theoharis, 2007). For anti-racist leadership to occur in schools where African American teachers are under-represented, leaders must demonstrate their awareness of the need for change. Also, anti-racism leaders should implement measures to combat disparities in ways that benefit African American teacher-leaders in their spheres of influence (Gooden & Dantly, 2012).

### **Critical Leadership Theories**

Critical leadership theories, in the context of African American teachers and leaders, are those that seek to deconstruct the policies, practices, and social functions that have created power imbalances in American schools and resulted in the marginalization of African American students and staff (Brown, 2004; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011). Merely noting the phenomenon of African American teachers leaving the profession at higher rates and less tenure in their positions is not enough—leaders must exercise critical leadership and examine situations beyond the *symptoms* to understand the mechanisms that lead to teachers leaving the profession. Leaders must move beyond the present into an examination of past actions and accepted foundational practices in education. Reflection is critical to leaders better understanding the imbalanced representation in education and ways to change both white and black teachers' beliefs regarding their right to be represented in the school community (Weiner, 2013).

Critical leadership theories require that plans to remove the constraints that continue to disenfranchise African American teachers, whether perceived or institutionalized via policy, are put into policy. These efforts are intended to challenge the status quo and disrupt the systems that perpetuate imbalance (Horsford, et al., 2011). From a critical leadership perspective, the status quo is viewed via a historical lens, which provides insight into how the current state of affairs became acceptable and continues to impact African American teachers. This impact on black teachers has caused decades of discrimination and denied access to educational opportunities while their white peers have access to more educational opportunities. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) added that African Americans continue to be undervalued and under-represented in the education community.

As a long-standing institution, the education system has been shaped by the racist and bigoted opinions of its developed societies. Both America's education system and the status quo of the power imbalance between African American and white educators have been created by discriminatory practices of the past and the continuation of poor race relations in the United States (Bogotch, 2014). Application of critical leadership praxis is essential to the disruption of these systems and creating a movement that may result in more recognizable positive outcomes for African Americans seeking to enter or remain in the teaching profession.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the literature and a conceptual framework relevant to the current exploration of principal leadership's influence on teacher morale. Some of the topics within this review include leadership theories and styles, factors leading to high and low levels of teacher morale, the principal's role in the school, anti-

racism, and the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale. Further, this review also listed gaps in previous studies, which show overall weaknesses in the existing body of literature and justify further research into the relationship between principal leadership and teacher morale. Because of this topic's complexity, the concepts of leadership styles and teacher morale were covered in substantial detail. These gaps identified in the literature were considered during the development of this study's research methods.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of principal leadership styles on teacher morale. To achieve that objective, I examined leadership styles principals used in the study setting, the factors teachers and principals perceive influence teacher morale and teachers' perceptions of principal leadership practices and behavior on their morale. Further, I examined whether principals make a conscious decision to incorporate anti-racism perspectives into their leadership practices. This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology employed in this study. It includes material on the research design, research questions, population, sampling strategy, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, limitations, and ethical considerations for the study.

#### **Research Methodology**

For this study, I selected a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research focuses on how people perceive and construct their worlds, interpret their experiences, and the meaning they attribute to those experiences (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative methodology enables exploring the research subject within the context of the affected group or individual's real-life experiences. The qualitative methodology has the primary characteristic of relying on qualitative data, such as words and perceptions, to examine interest (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative methodology is suitable for the present study since its purpose was to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding how principal leadership styles affect their morale. Quantitative methods on the other hand, rely on

measurable data such as metrics and numbers and seeks to measure cause and effect relationships based on precise statistical methods. The quantitative approach was, therefore, not suitable for this study (see Table 1). This study fulfills the criteria for qualitative research because it has subjective experiences, inductive data interpretation, and context-dependent methods, which are the main characteristics of qualitative methods (Bernard & Bernard, 2012; Creswell, 2015).

Table 3.1: Differences Between Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology

Philosophical Foundations	Qualitative Research Designs	Quantitative Research Designs
Ontology (perceptions of reality)	Researchers assume that multiple, subjectively derived realities can coexist.	Researchers assume that a single, objective world exists.
Epistemology (roles for the researcher)	Researchers commonly assume that they must interact with their studied phenomena.	Researchers assume that they are independent of the variables under study.
Axiology (researchers' values)	Researchers overtly act in a value-laden and biased fashion.	Researchers overtly act in a value-free and unbiased manner.
Rhetoric (language styles)	Researchers often use personalized, informal, and context-laden language.	Researchers most often use impersonal, formal, and rule-based text.
Procedures (as employed in research)	Researchers tend to apply induction, multivariate, and multi-process interactions, following context-laden methods.	Researchers tend to apply deduction, limited cause-and-effect relationships, with context-free methods.

*Note.* It is adapted from *research methods for political science* (p. 225), by D. E. McNabb, 2016, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## **Research Design**

Beyond selecting between a qualitative and quantitative methodology for research purposes, it is critical to design a study within a framework that will allow for the collection and interpretation of data in a way that is meaningful for the problem researched while providing answers to the research questions driving the work (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). For the qualitative methodology selected, it is clear that the study intends to collect personalized information through interactions with the studied phenomena to understand that multiple, subjectively-derived realities may exist for the study participants. To best understand the phenomena of principal leadership styles and teacher morale, I determined that a phenomenological interpretive study was most appropriate for this work.

As a qualitative research method, phenomenology is intended to describe how humans experience a particular phenomenon by setting aside biases and preconceived assumptions, allowing the researcher to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, and feelings of those who have lived the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Such an approach allows a researcher to generalize what it is like to experience a scenario, such as a relationship between principal leadership styles and teacher morale in African American populations. Phenomenology has two distinct ways: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. Descriptive phenomenology attempts to utilize data collected for purposes of merely recounting what is occurring within a specific phenomenon.

Interpretive phenomenology, as selected for this work, goes beyond simply recounting what the data describes in a pure form, but also moves toward arriving at an interpretation of the data in a way that incorporates verbal, non-verbal, and written communication to make meaning from the information presented (Matua & Van Der Wal,



2015). Through a hermeneutical data approach, the researchers will understand what is being stated by the study participants. Also, what those statements mean in the context of their individual and shared realities.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- a. What leadership styles are commonly used by the principals in the rural school district?
- b. How do African American teachers describe their level of morale, and what might cause low morale?
- c. What principal leadership practices do African American teachers identify as important in influencing teacher performance and satisfaction?

Teachers were interviewed individually at a designated location that is convenient for them. The interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to gather and collect data and identify common themes and factors that impact teacher morale.

### **Context of the Study**

A population consists of all of the individuals or other units of interest in a research study. This study's participants include 12 African American teachers (one male and five females from the middle school and one male and five females from the high school) and two former female teachers in a rural school district in South Carolina. The district enrollment consists of 3,547 students. Ninety-two percent of the students qualify for reduced and free meals. The demographic population includes 90% African American, 5% Caucasian, 3% of two or more races, and 2% Native American students. There are 227 teachers and ten principals employed in the district. It is challenging to attract and retain teachers.

It is essential to have a well-developed sampling strategy in qualitative studies. Sampling involves drawing a required number of elements from the sampling frame representing the elements in the population. It is essential to obtain a sample size that is neither too small, such that meaningful data cannot be collected, nor too large, such that the study becomes unwieldy and impractical. The sample size should be appropriate to the research design to collect ample data (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). For this study, I adopted a convenience sampling approach, which involves selecting an available sample from the interest population. The sample consisted of 12 current middle and high school teachers and two former teachers as participants in the current study. Because of the school district's relative uniformity in terms of demographic and economic factors, the entire district is a single site rather than multiple sites.

### **Data Collection and Criteria for Selecting Participants**

I communicated with the African American middle and high school teachers who participated in this project on teacher morale and principal leadership style, beginning by sending each participant a letter that explains the purpose and significance of the study. The cover letter also contained a confidentiality statement guaranteeing participants' anonymity and the security of research records. Additionally, the cover letter explained that participation was voluntary and would in no way affect participants' relationship with the local school system. During the interview process, I collected data from 12 currently employed teachers and two former African American teachers who worked at the middle and high school. Each participant was required to have two or more years under the leadership of the school's principal. Fourteen participants participated were selected to participate in the study. There are approximately 150 teachers in the district. I selected a small sample size in order to manage and collect detailed information. The

14 participants represented the district as a whole. All of the schools have been identified as Title One, and the schools have similar demographics. Others teachers met the criteria that could have been considered to participate in the study. However, the elementary teachers experience less turnover than the middle and high schools.

The district selected to participate in the research project experiences an ongoing problem of retaining teachers, especially at the middle and high school levels. I interviewed each participant individually on the school campus / in the county library. Each meeting lasted approximately 50 minutes. The interview process consisted of 23 open-ended questions that enabled the participants to provide detailed descriptions of their principals' leadership styles.

### **Transcription and Coding**

I recorded data collected from interviews with teacher participants through audio recording and kept notes during the interviews. I obtained permission to audio record the meetings before beginning each interview. I informed participants that the audio files would remain confidential and be stored in a secure location during the work and after the research conclusion. During the interview process, I also took notes and observed the participants with my full attention to capturing all nonverbal communication present in the sessions.

After each interview, I also documented my thoughts in a research journal. I recorded the perceptions and observations pertinent to the interviews but were not directly provided by study participants. Journaling is an integral part of the research, as it adds data that is not offered now by study participants, which can be essential for deconstructing the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2015). Also, as this is a phenomenological interpretive study, the notes and journals provided me with an

opportunity to interpret data collected through interview observation. At the same time, those impressions and memories were still fresh in my mind (Yin, 2015). I included this data during the coding process, along with the interview transcripts. In coding, I wanted to get to know the data. It is important to get a thorough overview of all the data that was collected before analyzing the items. Next, I coded the data by highlighting sections by looking at different phrases and sentences and developing shorthand labels and codes to describe the content. The phrases were highlighted in different colors to correspond with different codes. The codes described the feelings and idea to express each part of the text. I went through the transcript of every interview and highlight everything that stand out as being relevant or potentially interesting. Also, add new codes as I go through the text. After going through the text, I collate together all the data into groups identified by code. The codes allowed me to gain a condensed overview of the main points and common meanings that recur throughout the data.

I completed the interview transcription by listening to the audio recordings three times. Verbatim transcription ensures collecting all study participants' utterances and documentation of physical responses such as facial expressions, gestures, and other body language that may add depth to the interview data (Yin, 2015). According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), it is important to study participants' transcripts in connection with audio files to ensure transcripts' validity and accuracy related to the study participants' utterances and actions. After transcribing all the interviews, I coded the information to determine the themes and sub-themes present in the data.

I sought an independent party's assistance with coding the information in the data through inductive coding, allowing themes and sub-themes to emerge while reviewing the data. As Yin (2015) noted, initial coding reveals significant themes that emerge

effortlessly from the data, while line-by-line coding helps researchers identify less-obvious themes and sub-themes. After coding, I undertook the categorization process to step back and compile the coding information into categories that speak directly to the research questions and any additional, pertinent groups that emerged from the data, which add other meaning and context.

Through this process, I compiled and distilled the data into meaningful information that speaks not only to the phenomenon of the relationship between principal leadership styles and the morale of African American teachers but also to an interpretation of that information that may prove generalizable to other populations. The logic model presented in Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of coding and classifying the vast amount of data collected through the interview process and how it will synthesize into meaningful findings that emerge because of this work.

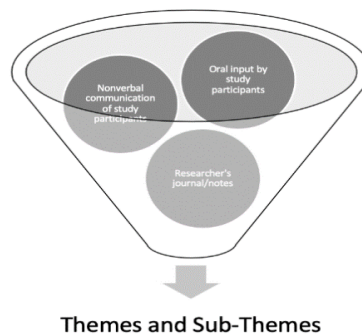


Figure 3.1: Coding and Classification

After categorization, I set the data aside for two days to gain distance from the details. After allowing the data to rest, I reviewed the coding and transcription for any features, themes, and sub-themes I may have missed during the initial review (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). At this time, I reviewed the categories to narrow their focus to three or four predominant types I used to shape answers to the research questions and provide details regarding the work's findings.

### **Limitations**

This study's primary limitation is based on three middle schools, three high schools, and two former teachers in South Carolina. Thus, the findings may not necessarily be generalizable to other school districts, due to differences in size, geographic location, and student and faculty composition.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study included the decision to limit the geographic boundaries to conduct the research. It was not feasible to survey all middle and high school African American teachers in rural South Carolina, so I selected respondents from one rural South Carolina district. Not all conclusions may be relevant to all schools in South Carolina. I chose only middle and high school African American teachers because teacher retention and teacher turnover issues are more prevalent at those levels.

### **Subjects**

The population of this study included three middle school teachers and three high school teachers in the district. The three middle schools employ 38 teachers, and the three high schools use 81 teachers. This study sample included six African American middle school teachers, six African American high school teachers, and two former teachers. The participants in this study were required to have two or more years of experience working under the current principal's leadership. The school district superintendent provided me with permission to use the interview questions.

### **Trustworthiness and Validity**

For this study, I identified my role as a district administrator and my beliefs regarding teacher morale as possible biases. Before my current position as a district administrator, I served as a building level principal for three years and a classroom

teacher for nine years. As a teacher, I worked with several principals I considered useful, and several I recognized ineffective. I observed various principals' behaviors, which affected teacher morale; however, because of my internal drive for student achievement, I did not allow how the principal carried out specific directives that I may not have agreed to offset or hinder me from accomplishing my goals. Principals who possessed certain qualities and styles, such as authentic, transformational, transactional, and transparent leadership, seemingly led their teachers and staff to make data-driven decisions through staff planning and collaboration. On the other hand, other principals were notably absent from the classroom, choosing to ignore dysfunctional and underperforming teachers. Those principals failed to address and respond to the critical issues teachers were facing in the classroom, such as student behavioral problems and limited resources.

In preparing to conduct the teacher interviews, I did not want to diminish the participants' responses in any way. In a qualitative paradigm, interviews are among the best ways to enter the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002). To achieve this, I employed open-ended questions and prompted participants to answer thoroughly. After completing the interviews, I invited participants to listen to the audio recording and review the transcription for accuracy (Patton, 2002). Thus, I employed a triangulation method to establish validity for this project. Further, I incorporated and analyzed various research questions from multiple perspectives to ensure consistency across data sources, increase the project's efficacy, and decrease any intrinsic bias I might have brought to the study. Based on Patton's (2002) work, I incorporated the following steps while conducting the triangulating data sources: (a) compare observation with interviews; (b) look for repetitive responses regarding a given topic; (c) compare the varied perspectives of participants; and (d) compare and analyze observations and interviews.

To establish validity and reliability, I incorporated rich, descriptive data throughout the process (Creswell 2013; Maxwell, 2013). My involvement with this research project included reviewing the documents and conducting the observations and interviews. Creswell (2013) has recommended that, once data are collected, the researcher should solicit feedback from the participants and explain the study's conclusion and outcome.

### **Summary**

This chapter explained the methods used in this qualitative study to explore principal leadership styles' effect on teacher morale. The purpose of this study was to understand the leadership styles principals adopted in the target setting, the level of morale among teachers, and the factors that influence morale from teachers' perspectives. This methodology facilitated teachers' views on how principal leadership behaviors and related practices affected their morale. Another intention of the present study was to discern whether principals consciously incorporate anti-racism into their decision-making. I designed the research questions for the study directly from these objectives. For this qualitative case study, based on a phenomenological interpretive design, I employed a convenience-sampling strategy to recruit 14 participants. I followed all ethical and legal rules mandated in research by the IRB Department. The next chapter provides a detailed discussion of the study's results.



## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore South Carolina teachers' perspectives on school principals' leadership styles and practices that impact these teachers' morale, job performance, and job satisfaction. Further, its purpose was to assess whether or not principals' leadership styles incorporate anti-racism techniques. This study's data include one-on-one interviews with 12 current teachers and 2 former teachers from 3 middle and 3 high schools in a rural South Carolina school district. Interview data were collected to elicit feedback on teachers' lived experiences with and perceptions of principal leadership style and its effect on their morale. A phone conversation guide (Appendix F) was used to direct conversations between the teachers and the researcher to ensure consistency across conversations.

The findings are also presented in this chapter, organized into two sections: (1) description of participants and (2) thematic analysis of teacher interviews. The themes identified in the study and presented in this chapter are divided into six categories: (1) styles of leadership adopted by school principals; (2) effect of principal leadership style on teacher morale; (3) influence of principal leadership style on teacher turnover; (4) principal's use of anti-racial leadership; (5) principal leadership practices that support teachers; and (6) principal leadership practices that negatively affect morale.

### **Research and Interview Question Alignment**

Table 2 provides an alignment protocol that shows the particular interview questions used to answer the current study's research questions. However, it is essential to

emphasize that questions 1–8 could not be associated with one research question. Instead, those questions provided background information about the respondents. Teacher participants’ answers to the background questions contributed to the findings of this study. Thus, as will be illustrated in further chapters, these responses are relevant to various aspects of the problem under investigation.

Table 4.2: Research Questions and Interview Questions Alignment

Research Question	Interview Questions
How do African American teachers describe their morale level, and what might cause low morale?	22: If I could earn as much money in another occupation, would you leave the profession? Explain your feelings about why you would or would not? 10: How do you perceive the relationship between the school principal's leadership style and teacher morale?
How do African American teachers describe their morale level, and what might cause low morale?	22: If I could earn as much money in another occupation, would you leave the profession? Explain your feelings about why you would or would not? 10: How do you perceive the relationship between the school principal's leadership style and teacher morale?
What principal leadership practices do African American teachers identify as important in influencing teacher performance, satisfaction, and attendance?	23: In what ways does your principal make your work more comfortable and more pleasant or the opposite? 20: Do you feel that the African American teaching load is greater than your counterparts? 15: Do you believe the principal treats staff with equal respect? Explain a scenario when it did or did not happen? 16: In what ways do the principal show concern for the faculty and staff? 17: How does the principal build leaders throughout the building? 18: How does the principal develop cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with? 19: How do the principal challenge people to try new and innovative ways to do their work?
Do African American teachers feel that principals intentionally consider	11: In anti-racism, a practice of the principal, explain? (In what ways does the principal consciously restructure practices and attitudes

anti-racism concepts when making a decision?	<p>to ensure that power is equal among African Americans and Whites)?</p> <p>12: Does the principal publicly recognize African Americans and their counterparts who exemplify a commitment to shared values?</p> <p>13: Does the principal support African American teachers' decisions on their own or suppress their views and ideas?</p>
What leadership styles are commonly used by the principals in the rural school district?	<p>9: How do you perceive the leadership style of your principal?</p> <p>13: Does the principal support African American teachers' decisions on their own or suppress their views and ideas?</p> <p>14: What strategies are used by the principal to assist teachers who are not performing at an acceptable level?</p> <p>21: Is there is a great deal of griping and arguing among teachers regarding the principal's leadership style? Provide examples of this scenario?</p>

### **Description of Participants**

In the current study, 12 current teachers and 2 former teachers were interviewed ( $N = 14$ ). All of these teachers were high school and middle school teachers, and all of them had taught for more than two years under the leadership of the same principal. This multi-year leadership provided teacher participants with sufficient experience serving under that leader to understand that leader's leadership style and its impact on their work lives and peers. Teacher participants had an average of 18 years of teaching experience. Participants are represented by P codes rather than any personal identifying information (e.g., real names) to ensure confidentiality and ensure that participants are not harmed due to study participation.

Table 4.3: Description of Participants

School and P codes	Teaching Status	Sex	# of Years Teaching	# of Districts Taught
Sharon	Current	F	16	3
Nessie	Current	F	16	1
Angela	Current	F	17	1
Karen	Current	F	5	1
Glo	Current	F	31	1
Michael	Current	M	35	1
Alfred	Current	M	22	3
Lori	Current	F	29	1
Virlee	Current	F	27	3
Jane	Current	F	31	4
LaShelle	Current	F	30	3
Cindy	Current	F	23	1
Valencia	Former	F	20	2
Shelley	Former	F	20	4

Teachers were interviewed in one-on-one interview sessions, and I posed 23 questions to current teachers and 24 questions to former teachers. It was vital to collect background information on the participants to understand previous experiences' roles in their perspectives about school morale and principal leadership style. As the teachers shared personal data, they included their number or been in education. All of the teacher participants had over 16 years of experience, except for one teacher. The interview questions are included in Appendix A.

### **Thematic Analysis of Interview Transcripts**

As discussed in the previous chapter, I analyzed data obtained from teacher interviews using thematic analysis. This process involved creating a list of recurring concepts within the interview transcripts, verifying identified concepts through two reads; generation of codes (i.e., creating an inventory of recurring patterns of information) in the

transcript, and applying codes to generate common themes within participants' responses. I developed this coding scheme using a blended approach: inductively (in consultation with primary data) and deductively (based on the study's conceptual framework, specific to both the research questions and the data set).

Based on the descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, I identified six themes that enabled me to establish conceptual correlations between the data and theoretical and empirical evidence on the research subject. These themes include (1) styles of leadership adopted by school principals; (2) effect of principal leadership style on teacher morale; (3) influence of principal leadership style on teacher turnover; (4) principal use of anti-racial leadership; (5) principal leadership practices that support teachers; and (6) principal leadership practices that affect morale negatively.

### **Theme 1: Styles of Leadership Adopted by School Principals**

The first theme is based on participants' responses concerning the leadership styles adopted by school principals. This theme primarily emerged in response to questions 9 and 21, although some insight did appear in answers to other questions. Unfortunately, the majority of these responses did not contain direct references to specific leadership styles. However, it can be inferred that most principals in this school district adopt authoritative, situational, *laissez-faire*, or transformational leadership styles.

Teacher participants reported the most common principal leadership styles as authoritative leadership. The term "micromanager" and a description of the principal as doing what she thinks best appears in 67.2% of the responses. Participant Virginia stated, "The principal is a micromanager. She wants you to follow the chain of command and bring her all questions and concerns before sharing with anyone else. She is not about

being a team player and interested in the staff coming together to discuss school initiatives and instructional plans. She likes to make decisions independently. Most of the factors Participant Virlee cited were distinctive authoritative leadership (Kantola, Barath, Nazir, & Andre, 2016).

Similarly, Participant Janet stated, “She doesn’t delegate enough. We have talented staff members who can offer great support to the school. She is a micromanager.” Cindy added:

The veteran teachers should have more flexibility and freedom to lead and not be treated like ‘a novice teacher.’ We should assist with leading workshops to inform new teachers, not sit meetings and workshops to listen, and participate in activities that we are already implementing and doing.

Participant LaShelle asserted:

Our principal’s leadership style is a micromanager. She is a part of everything that goes on around schools, such as clubs, organizations, and discipline. Our principal does not allow us to meet as a team to discuss, make decisions, and then report to her. She wants to manage the meetings.

Participant Cindy noted, “She will not allow you to use your creativity. She is more of a micromanager.” Supporting these descriptions, Participant Angela stated, “She asks your opinion, but she does what she thinks is best. She does what she wants to do to a certain way to a certain degree.”

The lack of employees’ engagement in decision-making and micromanagement tendencies included in these quotes suggest the presence of authoritative leadership (Dogan, Schroevers, Vener, & Yaros, 2016). Principals, along with their teachers and staff, should strive to improve school performance. Schools fit into one of two categories, either (1) stagnant and complacent or (2) thriving. Schools that are complacent are doing a disservice to the students, staff, parents, and community because if schools are not

progressing, they will lag and fail. Education is an entity that is generally trendy and progressive, and leaders should continuously seek ways to make advancements in the system.

Leaders who regularly involve their teachers and staff in the decision-making process find it beneficial in many ways. The critical decisions made collectively can transform a school. Ultimately, this type of collaboration involves an ongoing and constructive way of making decisions to maximize effectiveness. It is essential for principals to invest in and seek others' opinions to understand that no one individual has all of the answers.

When a principal collaborates with teachers and staff to discuss ideas, it allows these stakeholders to share their different perspectives and points of view. Having multiple perspectives sets the tone for individuals to express their opinions and engage in healthy conversations. When making decisions via a process and when participants are genuinely committed, everyone involved tends to buy-in and support the decisions even if they are not directly involved. Principals should consider that resistance is not necessarily an adverse reaction—it has some benefits. By bringing teachers and other staff to the table, resistance is naturally negated. Principals are ultimately responsible for the successes and failures of their school. When school-wide decisions are made solely by a principal, they are responsible for everything that happens, whether good or bad. When a principal makes too many decisions without consulting the staff, failure is inevitable.

Only one participant's response (7.1%) seemed to indicate a principal's use of the situational type of leadership in which the principal is sometimes *authoritative* and, at other times, *democratic*. As stated by Participant Michael, "He is not always

authoritative. He likes to bring everyone to the table. At times, he is authoritative; not passive gets everyone involved.” According to Bolman and Deal (2002), school leaders must understand school leadership's two fundamental realities: (1) Leadership is a three-way relationship between leaders, constituents, and concepts. Although individual leaders can make a difference, the stakeholders' influence creates a powerful force that favors the norm. (2) Leadership is not a dictatorship or a top-down process in which subordinates are controlled and told what to do. It is a process of reciprocal influence centered on questions of purpose, values, and strategies. School principals can no longer be expected to deal with the challenges of education alone. Teacher input is needed in all aspects of the school's operation if reforms will be long-lived (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economic, 1986; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001).

Three responses (21.4%) seem to indicate a *laissez-faire* style in which a leader cannot control his or her subordinates. Participant Jane described the principal as “not very involved, not very inviting, kinda lackadaisical.” Participant Virlee stated:

If a teacher had a problem, the principal was not attentive. She did not have a listening ear. She was condescending, not respectful. She rushed people off when we needed to speak to her. She did not get involved with teachers on any level and at any time. We were referred to as being ‘childish.’ Also, she was not overly concerned about others. For example, my daughter lost here key. I sat down to tell my principal, and she was nonchalant. She did not want me to leave school to take a key to my daughter, who was two hours away.

Participant Virlee also noted:

The principal was very secluded, not visible. She would make mention that she wasn't out monitoring the halls and visiting the classrooms. She said that she was not visible because of the discipline, parents, and meetings. Because the principal was not visible, it leads to a lot of unnecessary chaos. The number of student discipline infractions increased, and teachers felt that they were not supported when they requested the principal to address behavioral problems. The principal said the staff did not give her a fair chance, but she was not a people's person. “She spent the majority of her time in



the office and did not build a working relationship with the staff. Little gestures matter, like stopping by to check and teachers and asking is everything okay, or how are you doing.

Known as the absence of leaders (Bass & Avolio, 1990), *laissez-faire* leaders could be regarded as a special type of destructive or unhelpful leadership. These leaders do not show interest in subordinates' needs, make decisions, or give feedback on time. These leaders cannot meet legitimate expectations; therefore, role conflicts and ambiguities occur (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis, & Barling 2005).

In contrast, four participants, Micheal, Alfred, Sharon, and Andrea, described their principal's leadership styles in a positive manner, using such words as "great," "very effective," "open-door policy," "important to share ideas," and "organized." Being a principal has its challenges. It is not an easy profession. A principal's job causes high levels of stress, and not many people are equipped to handle the position's problems. The principal's job description is broad and encompasses many different elements as principals' hands are in every facet of the school—from students to teachers to parents. Principals are the chief decision-makers and supervisors of their buildings. Great principals have educational philosophies and mindsets that enable their success. They utilize and execute multiple strategies that will allow the people around them to be successful.

Principals are pulled into many conversations, discussions, meetings, and issues that can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed within the first few weeks of school. These feelings continue throughout the school year. With the amount of exposure, negativity, and concerns, principals must cope with, principals' first inclination to turn away, run, or hide. However, great leaders leave their doors open. While responding to

e-mails, meeting with parents, completing paperwork, and disciplining students along with unpredictable schedules, great leaders find the time to stop and listen to those they are expected to lead, from kindergarten students to the veteran teachers. Participant Valencia shared that her former principal had an effective leadership style and could promote accountability among employees and make sure that everyone felt valued. She was generally concerned with the staff and students. She was concerned about each individual and not just policies. For example, if a staff or the staff family member experienced health or other personal issues, and the staff needed to leave early or was absent, our principal understood each person's circumstances were different. She tried to meet them where they were." Moreover, this principal also advanced consistency within the staff, which is a critical requirement for principals.

Ensuring that all staff members feel valued is paramount in a principal's position. Principals have to learn to work with all types of people, all with unique personalities. Effective principals can decipher their staff and read them thoroughly. They know what motivates their staff, and they strategically deposit seeds that will eventually allow staff members to blossom in their positions. Effective principals are good listeners who value feedback and use it to make recognizable changes. Principals should remain on the front line to improve the school and to empower the staff.

## **Theme 2: Effects of Principal Leadership Style on Teacher Morale**

Teacher participants generally described the level of morale as suboptimal. Using negative terms such as *low morale*, *not good*, *not high*, *could be better*, *partial effect*, *do not like/agree with her leadership style*, and *not 100%*. Such negative descriptions

occurred in 78.3% of the responses to question 10. For instance, Participant Nessie described teacher morale was very low:

Teachers missed a lot of days from work. Teachers were reluctant to become involved in prom and after school activities. The principal, as stated previously, micromanages. The staff doesn't want to be involved because their ideas will get pushed back or made to think it is not important.

Participant Karen noted that 95% of the teaching staff disliked the principal's leadership style because "she focuses on petty things." Suppose a teacher left the door open during the instructional time that could pose a principal problem. Supporting this observation and linking this effect to authoritative and transactional components of leadership style, Participant Angela stated, "Some staff does not like her leadership style. She demands a lot. She documents by the school law and holds staff accountable." Participants Sharon, Nessie, Virlee, and Jane shared that morale among teachers was low. In contrast, positive descriptors of morale—including "great," "pretty good," and "loved her leadership"—appeared in only 21.7% of the responses.

Principals must be accessible to their staff. It is easy to go into the office and shut the door to get a few things done. But while completing assignments is essential, it should not regularly consume the school day. Principals must be accessible to all stakeholders, including staff members, teachers, parents, and especially students. To have outstanding schools, it is paramount that principals build and maintain healthy relationships with everyone. Being in high demand comes with the job and the territory. The staff goes to the principal when there is a need or a problem. In effect, productive principals make themselves available and are good listeners. Most importantly, principals should provide staff with viable solutions to their problems.

The participants also identified the consequences of low morale on the teaching staff. For instance, Participant Sharon noted that the principal's leadership style impacts teacher turnover and leads to chaos and a lack of relationships between the teachers and the principal. Specifically, Participant Sharon pointed out, "The more visible a principal is, the less the teacher has to deal with behavioral problems. Lack of the relationship between principal and staff did not develop teacher morale." Other impacts include a lack of autonomy for veteran teachers and poor teacher involvement. For instance, Participant Jane stated, "The morale was very low. Teachers missed a lot of days from work." Other responses regarding issues that negatively affected teachers appeared in response to question 21. Participant Nessie noted that when principals reprimand teachers in front of students, students are not happy and become disrespectful to the principal, and teacher morale falls.

Looking at griping (complaining or teacher dissatisfaction) as an antecedent to low morale, 50% of participants ( $n = 7$ ) noted no griping among teaching staff. In comparison, 35.7% ( $n = 5$ ) stated that there was griping among teaching staff. A few participants, like Angela, noted the presence of compromise between principals and teachers: "We didn't always agree on everything. She pushes test scores. She looked at grade books and the number of projects per grading period. She compromised with us."

Several interviewees emphasized that lack of consistency is a crucial reason for principal leadership's negative influence on teacher morale. Participant Lashelle shared, "Some teachers have keys to enter the school building if they need to come in early or stay late, but other teachers do not have the same privilege. I call it 'favoritism.'" Participant Sharon pointed out that this factor could discourage teachers, and Participant Karen added that it might decrease teachers' passion, resulting in reduced productivity

and performance. Simultaneously, the majority of interviewees noted that teachers' morale does not depend on principals' leadership. Interviewees Lashelle, Valencia, Virlee, Alfred, Lori, Karen, and Angela provided extensive information in response to question 3 about their educational philosophies (Table 4) without mentioning the principal's role in its fulfillment. Furthermore, these teacher participants did not consider this when discussing the obstacles, they faced in response to question 5.

Table 4.4: Teachers' Teaching Philosophy

Participant	Teaching Philosophy
Angela	To inspire and to educate
Karen	All children can learn
Alfred	Everyone can learn if given a chance
Lori	Teaching provides the chief means of passing knowledge on the next generation
Lashelle	I believe that all students can learn, providing a healthy and supportive environment
Valencia	Education is the key to enriching lives

While the teachers come from various backgrounds, they have similar experiences, such as growing up in poverty, influencing them, negative encounters in college, and teaching experiences.

### **Theme 3: Influence of Principal Leadership Style on Teacher Turnover**

Regarding question 22, which addressed whether the participants would leave their teaching profession for a career with better compensation, 70% of participants stated they would not leave the profession. Their reasons included commitment to the teaching profession, commitment to training children, building community, love of teaching, and the joy of teaching systems and schedule, such as vacations. Thirty percent of the participants stated they would leave for reasons such as disinterest among students, better pay, and an overwhelming workload. None of the "leavers" mentioned the principal

leadership style as a reason to exit the profession. Only one of the “stayers” referenced the principal’s leadership as a contributor to their decision not to leave. The former teachers did not reference principal leadership styles among their reasons for leaving. However, both mentioned the environment was not conducive. Also, the environment was once described as “too political.” Valencia asserted:

One of the reasons I left was because it became too political to be effective. People seemed to be doing things to get back at one another. She was one of the most effective principals. Under her leadership, we became a school of choice where students out of the attendance zone could attend. We were recognized as one of the top schools in the nation. Yet, they were willing to remove her from her post. It sent a message that the district did not care about the children. We became teachers to make a difference. I would be willing to come back if the attitude was right.

Teacher turnover in schools is inevitable, but how principals respond is extremely important. Principals can take a reactive or proactive approach regarding how they prepare for teachers' potential turnover (Cassidy, Lower, Kintner-Duffy, Hegde, & Shim, 2011). In the study, responsible schools took immediate steps to counteract and secure new employees to fill vacant teacher positions and provided emergency waivers and certificates. On the other hand, proactive schools had systems to address and resolve teacher attrition issues while still maintaining stability (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). The perceptions of teacher turnover have a negative impact on the system. Some of the reasons include that teacher turnover was disruptive (Ingersoll, 2001, 2002), and schools' instability was problematic (Whitebrook & Granger, 1989). The effects adversely impact the standard operating procedures and functionality of the school. The turnover impedes student achievement and success (Loeb, Boyd, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2005) and the camaraderie and benevolence of the remaining staff (Haynes, Maddock, & Goldrick, 2014; MacDonald, 1999). Teacher turnover hinders the school structure and is perceived as an obstacle to the school and community.

None of the study participants commented on principals' leadership styles when discussing their challenges in response to Q5. The comments imply that the principals' leadership style is not a significant driver of teacher retention. Respondents' answers to questions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 suggested a teacher's willingness to continue working or leave an institution is based primarily on his or her motivation, teaching passion, and relations with students, colleagues, and family members. The role of school principals is barely crucial in this sphere. While many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with some work conditions and school policies, they did not generally link these issues to principals' mistakes. For instance, participant Jane complained that the lack of money is one of the major obstacles to teaching. However, she did not blame school principals for her low salary.

#### **Theme 4: Principal Use of Anti-Racism Leadership**

This theme concerning principals' use of anti-racial leadership appeared in participants' responses to questions 11, 12, and 13. However, questions 5 and 6 also generated some answers related to this topic. Regarding the restructuring of attitudes and practices to ensure equal perceptions of power among teachers of different races, most participants reported that their principals treat all teachers equally, without considering race. Participant Sharon stated, "She looks at everyone equally." Similarly, participant Karen said, "Everyone is treated equally." Other positive phrases used to describe the principals' approaches to equality include *no issues*, *no favoritism*, *treat everyone the same*, *no discrimination*, and *not suppress ideas*. Participant Michael noted:

Our principal does an excellent job of recognizing Whites and Blacks. He works hard to include everyone. He plays to the strength of the staff. Black or White, he looks for effectiveness. Get the right person in the right place to be successful, a mixture of people with different perspectives.

Regarding staff recognition, participants noted the principals publicly recognize their performance. This type of recognition occurs in various ways, including verbally and using gifts and treats. When supporting African American staff's decisions, the participants noted their principals support all ideas based on the schools' missions and goals. Participant Karen noted the principal sometimes listens to a new idea and supports it and sometimes does not. Similarly, participant Glo stated, "Sometimes she would leave the idea or adjust the idea." Participant Michael also said, "She supports a dream and idea. She gives the school law and implements them." These responses indicate that the principals pay attention to all ideas, evaluates them, and support plans which align with each school's progress.

Concerning the workload for African Americans, most participants stated that all staff has the same workload, which indicates fairness to everyone, irrespective of race. However, Glo and Michael reported a shifted increase in responsibility for African American teachers during graduation ceremonies, homecoming, and prom. The responses mostly indicated that the principals do not practice anti-racial leadership as a deliberate or intentional leadership style and do not focus on race.

Respondents' answers to question 5 confirmed that anti-racial leadership is not prevalent at the educational institutions in this study. While many interviewees shared racial discrimination stories, most of them indicated implicit trends rather than specific patterns. For instance, participant Shelley argued that she "has experienced subtle rejection from some of [her] White colleagues" but did not provide clear examples of this rejection. Similarly, most of the other respondents who mentioned this phenomenon used vague phrases without specific examples. In general, none interviewees mentioned



having encounters with anti-racial leadership in college or their previous workplace.

Valencia shared:

However, as a minority, I did have to deal with some covert racial discrimination. For example, one English professor would stress that late papers would receive a ten-point decrease each day that it was late. I never turned in any late papers, yet I could never get a grade higher than a "C." On one occasion, I assisted a fellow student (White) who had gotten two papers behind. Her papers were over a week late! When she received her grade for the late papers, they both were "A's! He didn't even take off points for them being late. I then realized that his class rules only applied to the Black students, not the White students.

### **Theme 5: Principal Leadership Practices that Support Teachers**

The participants stated that principals implement activities that support teachers, such as pairing younger teachers with veteran teachers, visiting classrooms, observing course instruction, and making suggestions. Respondents indicated that principals show respect for teachers and reach out to them when there is a problem, demonstrating concern for their welfare. Positive principal behaviors identified also included delegating tasks, encouraging teamwork, implementing an open-door policy, and avoiding the practice of humiliating teachers when things go wrong. Participant Karen stated that:

She uses data-data driven. She looks at the data from the evaluation and pairs a teacher to develop the skill to get them to see other perspectives and how to handle an instructional matter, re-teach, and how to handle classroom management.

Participant Valencia discussed the role of empathy, stating, "She has a one-on-one. She will chat with you. If you need to leave for an emergency or any other important situation, she will look out for you. She can relate." Other positive practices used by school principals included teacher empowerment and leadership building. Participant Cindy noted:

She assigned leadership roles. Committees worked on school beautification. She mixed the members of the staff up, and people got the opportunity to work with different

staff members. She placed a novice teacher with a seasoned teacher. She gave power to different teachers, and she gave everyone a position.

In response to question 23, participant Michael noted the importance of the principal's responsiveness and their decisive role, stating: "Honestly, I feel he did an awesome job. He did not let us do what we wanted to do, meaning he addressed issues and matters."

In general, the results indicated that the majority of principals' efforts to support teachers focus on team-building models. Principals seek to ensure departments work to enable every member to feel valued and respected and launch many initiatives to support this goal. For instance, participant Lori stated that her principal "works well with the faculty and staff and encourages us to work as a team and to be the best that we can be for the students." In some institutions, principals work to create a familial atmosphere among the staff to ensure the relationships aren't solely professional. For example, participant Cindy stated that "we work well together and we are one blended family," which exemplifies the desired goal of such efforts.

Principals have an impact on teacher job satisfaction and retention. Research reveals that teacher practices, beliefs, and characteristics, and school leadership directly affect teacher retention. Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, and Meisels (2007) asserted that administrative support was more critical to "leavers" than "stayers." Likewise, a large body of research connects teacher job satisfaction and retention to principal leadership (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, & Wycoff, 2011; Grissom, 2011. Tickle, Chang, & Kim, 2011). School principals provide teachers resources and create opportunities for teachers to work and learn collaboratively with community stakeholders. The positive

correlation and connection between teacher support and low turnover rates are apparent in principals' leadership styles.

A study conducted by Brown and Wynn (2009) investigated the principal's role in teacher retention. The investigation disclosed several common characteristics of principals with low attrition in urban schools, suggesting that teachers desire and yearn support and resources. The findings can also be attributed to rural school districts. In a study conducted by Brown and Wynn (2009), the principals agreed that building capacity, spending more time, and providing resources are crucial elements when retaining good teachers. The principals' visibility and accessibility surveys revealed that teachers desired the principal to be available, spend time talking to staff, parents, students, and community, attentively listening, and having an open-door policy.

Grisson (2011) stated that good principals influence teacher retention by incorporating intangible rewards such as displaying a positive school vision and recognizing staff. Teachers desired orderly work environments by having high expectations for student behavior and establishing procedures and routines. These were factors the teachers rated as useful in detrimental and disadvantaged schools.

### **Theme 6: Principal Leadership Practices that Affect Morale Negatively**

Participant Sharon, in response to question 9, noted that when a teacher does not have a close relationship with the principal, it leads to low morale among teachers.

Micromanagement and regular class interruptions also have a negative impact on teacher morale. As participant Sharon noted:

Not so pleasant-constant meetings, but it was pleasant receiving the feedback. She says, 'Thank you. I hope you are Having a good day,' constant feedback. Teachers want to feel valued. How teachers manage their day is significant. That is why people are leaving, teachers, and students. We have to hold classes if someone is out. I have

to hold a class and bring students to my class. A lot of interruptions-holding classes. No plan in place. Teachers have to monitor other teachers' classes.

Supporting the statement that micromanagement affects teachers negatively, participant

Glo stated:

Oh! You have to have it in yourself to be a leader. If someone had a beautiful idea, it was knocked down or altered. She likes to micromanage.”

Participant Nessie noted that their work could have been more pleasant if the principal

listened and gave them more autonomy. She continues:

My job was not too pleasant. I think to make my job more pleasant, the principal should have listened and understood that I am a graduate of the school. I am from this community. Don't change things that have worked. Listen and trust staff and don't cut them down. Allow people to try and do their work. Give teachers the space to do their work.

Disrespecting teachers in front of students also have a negative impact on morale.

Participant Virlee stated: “I have observed both sides of the principal. She was a person of few words. She tried to be a little more cordial near the end of the school year.

However, I have seen her disrespect teachers in front of students.” Unfortunately, the interviews did not provide much information regarding the negative traits of principals given most of the respondents focused on discussing their perceptions, feelings, and emotions, rather than the behavior of other stakeholders. In this situation, it is possible that some negative traits of principals did not receive enough attention in the interviews.

The participants expressed their dislikes. However, the incorporated their responses based on the leadership styles of the principals and did not focused on personal issues or the attitudes and behaviors of the principals.

Principals play a crucial role in how morale affects teachers. In a study conducted, four major themes were identified as contributing factors that influence teacher morale:

1.) administrative support; 2.) working conditions; 3.) input on decision making; and 4.)

mentoring support (Darling-Hammond, 2003). As it relates to administrative support, Bolton (2002) study revealed that teachers were less likely to leave the district due to insufficient or low salaries. Still, they were leaving the teaching field as a result of lack of support by the principal, lack of professionalism, and collegiality. Teachers want to feel a sense of solidarity and unity with the principal instead of feeling intimidated and fearful (Day, Petty, & Smith, 2008). According to Darling-Hammond (2003), work conditions play a significant role in teacher morale, which results in teachers deciding to move from one school to another school in the district or to leave the teaching profession altogether. Cochran-Smith (2004) adds that teachers need schools to be safe havens where they can feel secure, supported, and have the opportunities to work collaboratively with their colleagues instead of working in isolation. Connolly (2007) adds that teachers want principals well-balanced, helpful, and calm leaders.

According to Darling-Hammond (2003), schools can benefit from the principal establishing a mentoring program for teachers, primarily first-year and other novice teachers. These programs are beneficial in helping new teachers by empowering them and improving their attitudes about themselves. Besides, the program can give new teachers feelings of efficacy and help them with their instructional and teaching skills. Studies have revealed that mentoring programs increase retention rates if supported by the school administration (Darling-Hammond, 2003). For veteran teachers, they need ongoing challenges and opportunities to keep them stimulated and excited about the profession. Serving as mentors and coaches can give them a sense and feeling of belonging, and the veteran teachers learn new ideas and best practice implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Graham (1996) asserts that for teachers to thrive in a collegial setting, it is vital for teachers to serve as active participants in the school culture and not become just a

bystander. When principals allow teachers the opportunity to serve in the capacity of a leadership role, the teacher's commitment to the school and the district increase, job satisfaction grows, and teacher morale increases.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter contained the results of the thematic analysis of the data collected. This analysis was conducted via coding, categorization, and theme development and aided by the alignment protocol developed for the review. Based on the data analysis, six themes were identified: (1) leadership styles commonly adopted by school principals; (2) effect of principal leadership style on teacher morale; (3) effect of principal leadership style on teacher turnover; (4) principal's use of anti-racism leadership; (5) principal's leadership practices that support teachers; and (6) principal's leadership practices that negatively affect morale. The next chapter provides a discussion of these summary of finding, principal leadership styles identified, leadership practices and anti-racism decision-making, implications for practice, direction for future research, and conclusion.

## **Chapter 5: Results**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the influence of principal leadership styles on teacher morale. In this chapter, a summary of the results is provided, results are analyzed, and both theoretical and empirical data are used to further develop the study's conceptual framework. The research questions that guided this inquiry were as follows: (1) How do African American teachers describe their morale level, and what might cause low morale? (2) Which principal leadership styles do African American teachers identify as important in influencing teacher performance and satisfaction? And (3) Do African American teachers feel that principals intentionally consider anti-racism concepts when deciding?

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question asks how do African American teachers describe their level of morale and what might cause low morale? According to the study results, African American teachers overwhelmingly described their level of morale as low. Similarly, existing research reported that African Americans teachers exhibit some of the highest percentages of adverse outcomes, such as turnover and attrition, due to low morale (Gist, 2018). While African American teachers are more likely to remain in schools that enroll African American students, they have a higher rate of teacher attrition than other racial groups. These attrition rates are even higher in charter schools (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Gist, 2018).

In the results of the present study, low levels of teacher morale appeared in 78.3% Of the responses to the interview question regarding the relationship between a principal's leadership style and a teacher's morale. Respondents also indicated that specific leadership practices cause low morale, including micromanaging teachers, which creates negative psychological work environment. Additional contrary methods include berating teachers in front of students, ignoring teachers' needs, lack of principals' involvement in activities, poor collaboration, and community building, and poor school management. These findings align with existing knowledge regarding school leadership and teacher morale (Noguera, 2015). Overall, given the outcomes of the study, a principal's leadership style is a critical determinant of the level of morale exhibited by the teachers.

The results of this study further indicated several causes of low morale in teachers. These causes include a lack of autonomy for veteran teachers, low levels of support, and few opportunities for leadership development. Additionally, teachers indicated poor relationships with principals, the stifling of their creativity, lack of voice, an unreasonably high workload, low teacher pay, and students' negative attitudes toward education, all attribute to their low morale. These behaviors can be manifested in cultural, organizational, or even broader environmental contexts and are in alignment with the results of previous literature (Blatchford, Pellegrini, & Baines, 2015).

Factors attributed to low teacher morale can also lead to African American teachers leaving the profession. For instance, previous research indicated reasons such as inadequate training and preparation, hostile racial climates, restrictive curricula, and fewer opportunities for leadership and career advancement (Gist, 2018; Philip, 2013). Further existing research noted African American teachers are less likely to be hired,



have lower ratings compared to other racial groups of teachers, and face more job terminations due to school closures than other groups (Gist, 2018).

The goal of the present study was to explore the effects of principals' leadership styles on the morale of African American teachers. Given this objective, it is essential to note there may be additional factors, which cause low morale, unattributed to school principals' behavior. Morale denotes how workers feel about both their work ethic and their work environment (Ahmad et al., 2001). Previous scholars identified factors influencing morale including stress (Edmonds, 2009); school culture (Blackburn, 2015); work characteristics (intrinsic characteristics such as autonomy and meaningfulness, and extrinsic characteristics such as salary and benefits) (Ayele, 2014; Küskü, 2003; She-Cheng & Lin, 2011); unmet needs (physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs) (Ayele, 2014); job satisfaction (Himli et al., 2016); and administrative support and leadership (Roelen et al., 2008).

Previous research indicated leadership practices of the school principal as a primary factor in teacher morale, given the principal has the overall responsibility for creating and managing culture and school community that promotes morale among teachers (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005). Using responsive and effective leadership practices, the school principal can significantly address some of the negative factors attributed to low morale. The principal can also provide input regarding compensation decisions to ensure teachers receive competitive pay, which helps meet their needs. Lastly, principals can adjust teachers' workloads to encourage better stress management and coping.

However, additional factors can affect African American teachers' morale at work. For instance, Short and Wilton (2016) suggested that longstanding social, political,

systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement have worked to shape the current educational workforce. There are differences in how African American teachers prepare for their roles. The characteristics of where school employees work, and the reasons for attrition among the group (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014). Regarding historical attributions, the principal may have no power to change them or may be involved in advocacy to change them.

Similarly, Devi and Vijayakumar (2016) defined morale as involving a psychological aspect, representing the mental attitude, which enables acceptance of group goals as well as psychic qualities such as resolution, confidence, endurance, and courage. The school principal may be able to influence morale significantly, based on the conventional and classical approaches of their leadership practices. However, they may be limited in their ability to affect morale when it is based on psychological qualities like courage and fortitude.

It is also crucial to discuss the profound impact of the psychological and emotional factors, which influence teachers' morale. The results of this study indicate that teachers' relationships with students and colleagues drive intangible variables related to teachers' character, life experiences, and educational philosophies. These factors significantly mediate the relationship between external parameters, such as principals' leadership traits, teacher salary amounts, and teacher motivation (Young & Crow, 2016).

An analysis of the interview transcripts for this study revealed those respondents' background experiences relate to their low morale. Specifically, a significant number of participants noted they became teachers because of pressure from their family members. Participants Anthony and Valencia directly attested to many of their family members

being educators, and most of the other interviewees expressed similar sentiments. Many interviewees became teachers despite their desire to pursue other passions. This assertion attributes to the low morale of teachers. Previous literature indicated how a sincere interest in the profession is critical for a teaching job (Ellis, 2015). Thus, its absence might severely affect teachers' motivation.

Interviewees' responses to InQ1, InQ2, InQ3, InQ4, InQ5, InQ6, InQ7, and InQ8 contributed to the assumption that teachers' lack of sincere interest in the profession may have been a cause of their low morale. For instance, participant Shelley complained: "I wish I had pursued a degree in psychology but decided to pursue a degree in education since I had already earned a bachelor's degree in English." The response suggests that, for some respondents, they did not feel justified in their decisions to become teachers. Thus, low morale among respondents explains their low level of satisfaction with their work responsibilities. While low teacher morale attributes not only to a lack of interest in the profession, it is a reason for why it occurs.

The results of this study indicate that relationships with family and work-life balance may also affect teachers' morale. Many of the participants are single parents and have more than three children, which often requires significant effort to balance work and other responsibilities. The work situation can make it difficult for teachers to be consistently productive at work (Helliwell, 2015). For instance, participant Valencia takes care of five daughters, a granddaughter, and a pet, while teaching at a middle school. Family care needs might not allow some respondents to embrace the teaching profession fully.

Therefore, principals' efforts to address the causes of low morale may be more effective when they consider the role of external influences and only try to manage what

is within their authority. Psychological and family-related variables significantly mediate the relationship between principals' leadership styles and teachers' morale (Karadag, 2015). When adopting effective leadership such as communication, supportiveness, and autonomy, they help to improve morale among African American teachers, instead of practicing micromanagement techniques.

Factors related to racial discrimination may also affect teachers' morale. Most of the respondents' answers to InQ6 indicated they faced instances about racial and gender discrimination. While these experiences appeared to be subtle rather than explicit, they may negatively influence interviewers' job attitudes, especially considering that some participants reported these trends to be continuous. Interestingly, considering the objective of this study, it is not essential to determine whether these perceptions based on cases of racial and gender discrimination or if they were unjustified (King & Lawley, 2016). Regardless of their validity, such opinions have a massive impact on teachers' self-concept and relationships with colleagues, students, and principals. Thus, this results in indirect implications for their morale. Therefore, addressing the perceptions of African American teachers and signs of racial discrimination, as well as the attitudes of female African American teachers regarding gender discrimination, is vital to ensure high morale.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question addresses the question, "What principal leadership practices do African American teachers identify as important in influencing teacher performance and satisfaction?" First, it is essential to understand the relationship between teacher performance and satisfaction. Additionally, it is necessary to consider teacher morale, given its vitality to the present study. High performance, achievement, and

attendance all indicate high levels of teacher morale. Low levels of teacher morale are associated with dissatisfaction, low attendance, absenteeism, low performance, and burnout (Blackburn, 2015; Littleford, 2007). The results of the study indicated several factors that influence teacher performance, satisfaction, and attendance. Those factors include support for teachers—such as having a mentor, autonomy for veteran teachers, and constructive guidance from the school principal. These components lead to better performance among teachers. Further, factors such as recognition of achievement, equal treatment of all teachers, respect from the supervisor in front of students, and good relationships between school principals and teachers positively influence teacher satisfaction and attendance. Other factors that improve teacher satisfaction and performance include open-door policies by principals, opportunities for leadership development, empathy from principals, team building, and teacher empowerment.

Another vital component to consider when addressing teacher morale is the consistency of principals' decisions. Participants in the study suggested that inconsistency in principals' decisions and unreliable school policies contribute significantly to teacher dissatisfaction. Respondents' answers to InQ6 expressed their desires for consistency in policies and decisions. Additional responses to the same question included solutions regarding subtle signs of racial discrimination. Therefore, the participants considered consistent policies as a vital tool to expect equal treatment from their superiors. The connection between the consistency of organizational policies and the fears of racial discrimination supports previous academic literature (Major, Dovidio, & Link, 2018).

More specifically, respondents reported being concerned that, without specific policies to counter discriminatory practices, their non-Black colleagues would experience

preferential treatment. For example, participant Valencia shared that even though their teacher colleague allegedly had strict procedures concerning penalties for students turning in late assignments, participant Valencia reported that this person never applied the consequences to White students. In contrast, participant Virlee could never receive higher than a “C,” even though she always met deadlines. Many African American teachers expressed concerns that similar situations might occur in their workplace. The same situations encouraged them to advocate for the establishment of strict, consistent school policies and the appointment of a principal who consistently applies them to all staff members.

These findings align with those of previous literature regarding effective principal leadership. In their leadership, effective principals facilitate a school culture, which is psychologically healthy for teachers and students, promotes a safe work environment, demonstrates the proactive promotion of equity, and collaborates with other community members (Edmonds, 2007; Lambersky, 2016). An effective leader involves teachers in decision-making processes, shows an interest in teachers’ work, allows autonomy and self-direction, and supports professional growth among teachers (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; Edmonds, 2007; Koerner, 1990; Whitaker et al., 2000).

The competencies required for school leadership emphasize principles such as respect for teachers, equality, community building, and the empowerment of teachers. For instance, the ISLLC encompasses six standards for principals, which include fairness and respect, treating all persons with dignity, and celebrating the accomplishments of students and staff. The standards also include involving all stakeholders (in decision making, shared ownership, and shared responsibility for accountability) and demonstrating attitudes, beliefs, and values, which will inspire others to perform at higher

levels (Littleford, 2007). The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has guidelines for administrators, which emphasize leadership, setting high-performance expectations for all students and adults within the school, actively engaging the school community, and creating shared responsibility for the success of the school and students (NAESP, 2001).

In addition to the leadership styles of the principals, we discussed the commonly used leadership styles by principals in the rural school district. Based on the interview data, I identified the four leadership styles used by principals in the rural school district as authoritative, situational, laissez-faire, and transformational leadership styles. While the participants did not usually name these leadership styles directly, I used their descriptions of the leadership attributes and practices of the school principals to identify similar leadership styles.

**Authoritative leadership.** Authoritative leadership was the most common leadership style principals in the rural school district employed. One participant mentioned the authoritative style of leadership directly, and 74% of responses included descriptions like “micromanager” and “doing things her way.” Authoritative leadership is synonymous with the autocratic style of leadership. As addressed in the literature review, in this style of leadership, an individual has complete control over decision-making, with little or no input from subordinates. Thus, autocratic leadership base authoritarian control over employees (Maqsood et al., 2013), and it is evidenced by micromanagement.

Further, the respondents who highlighted this style of leadership generally reported low levels of morale. They reported feeling that their creativity was stifled, and they lacked the autonomy to perform their work despite years of experience in the profession. They also experienced poor relationships between the school principal and the

teachers, low teacher involvement, if any, in decision-making, and significant “griping” among teachers. This dissatisfaction with authoritative leadership aligns with the findings of previous scholarship regarding this leadership style. The results of existing leadership indicate that autocratic leadership may lead to higher productivity in the short-term. However, this style of leadership characterizes the lack of initiative, institutional squabble, and resentment among staff (Amanchuwu et al., 2015).

The reason authoritative leadership was ineffective attributes to interviewees’ personal experiences of work-life balance. A significant number of people who participated in this study have large families and numerous responsibilities at home, which can negatively influence their ability to demonstrate high performance (Hart-Johnson, 2017). With heavy home responsibilities, some interviewees might regard teaching at school as a refreshing change. At school, they have a chance to feel fulfilled in their work and enjoy a level of flexibility they do not experience at home. However, a principal with an authoritative leadership style obviates potential flexibility, which contributes to teachers’ tiredness and anxiety.

**Situational leadership.** While respondents did not name situational leadership explicitly, some respondents stated how principals agreed with their ideas on some occasions and did not at other times. Other participants noted that principals agreed with their ideas if the ideas supported the school’s mission and goals or if they aligned with set standards. These explanations indicate a situational style of leadership, described as a style of leadership, which is appropriate to a given situation at a given time. As noted in the literature review, situational leadership is a style of leadership in which the leaders adjust their leadership styles to fit the circumstance or situation that supports his or her associated goals (Hattock et al., 2016). The participants identified both directive and



supportive attributes in principals' leadership practices, which also aligns with previous literature regarding situational leadership. According to Ghazzawi et al. (2017), situational leadership connects directive and supportive dimensions, each of which uses effectively in the situation being addressed.

Situational leadership considers effective in some settings; however, it may not always be suitable from the perspective of African American teachers. As stated previously, many participants reported that there was no concern about racial discrimination but wanted consistency of principals' actions and school policies an effective prevention measure. Regarding this issue, participants perceived situational leadership not always positively, given its lack of flexibility, which prioritizes decision-making based on the specifications of each situation (Magee, 2015). Therefore, school principals who use situational leadership should maintain consistency in their analyses and decisions, which might be extremely challenging.

**Laissez-faire leadership.** Participants also described characteristics similar to those employed in laissez-faire leadership. With this style, the leader is uninvolved or disengaged when performing their duties. Some participants described principals as uninvolved, invisible, and disinterested in solving problems. The laissez-faire style of leadership requires the least managerial oversight (Rashid et al., 2013). It is characterized by indifference to workers' activities and ignoring problems, which arise in the workplace. Workers' performance is not monitored, and authority is delegated to any willing person (Edmonds, 2009). The results of this study indicated that most principals in the associated district did not employ laissez-faire leaders. However, participants did state that such leadership behaviors lead to chaos, behavioral problems among students, and low morale among teachers.

During their interviews, respondents indicated their jobs include solving several problems daily, some of which require principals' assistance. Principals who maintain a Laissez-faire leadership style are not likely to assist and, therefore, receive negative perceptions by their subordinates. Negative attitudes towards this type of leadership among African American teachers' attribute to their concerns about possible racial discrimination in the workplace and the need for consistency, which discussed in the previous subsection of the chapter.

**Transformational leadership.** While participants did not explicitly mention transformational leadership, 28.5% described the attributes of their principals' leadership styles as them having an open-door policy, encouraging idea sharing, establishing well-defined goals, and relating to and demonstrating concern for students and teachers. These descriptors are critical elements of the transformational leadership style. When this style utilized, people engage with one another in such a way that leaders and followers achieve increased levels of motivation and morality (Hearn, 2013; Northouse, 2004). Some of the transformational leadership traits can be described as an idealized influence (holding others' trust and acting as their role model), inspirational motivation (providing a vision and inspiring others), intellectual stimulation (encouraging creativity and innovation), and individualized consideration (demonstrating genuine concern for peoples' well-being).

Findings from empirical studies also support the positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher morale. For instance, Lambersky (2016) found that transformational leaders support the emotional and affective needs of teachers and students, which positively affects teacher morale. Jolley (2016) noted that transformational leadership influenced teachers' self-efficacy through creativity,

professional development, vicarious experience, and vision (Jolley, 2016). This study's participants preferred this style of leadership, as indicated by their recommendations for what principals can do to make teachers feel happier at work. They stated that principals should promote creativity, facilitate autonomy, demonstrate support, and provide mentorship, which are all attributes and outcomes of transformational leadership.

The practical application of transformation leadership by school principals includes both team-building activities and customized approaches for each teacher. Extant research suggests both elements are mandatory for the success of transformational leaders. In addition to ensuring warm and productive relationships between members of the staff, principals with transformational leadership styles also take a personal approach with faculty members, such as the one described by participant Michael. Michael shared: My principal shares the goals and expectations and trust the teachers to execute the plan and finally discuss the results with him.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question, "Do African American teachers feel that principals intentionally consider anti-racism concepts when making a decision?" The racial context was particularly crucial for this study, given its implications. African American teachers navigate an educated workforce influenced by longstanding social, political, systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014). Accordingly, one of the goals of the study was to explore whether the principals' leadership styles incorporated anti-racism techniques. As a leadership practice, anti-racism involves consciously restructuring practices and attitudes to ensure power is equal among all teachers. It also includes publicly recognizing African American teachers, as

well as their White counterparts who exemplify a commitment to shared values. Lastly, it involves supporting the decisions African American teachers make on their own, rather than suppressing their views and ideas.

Contrary to the results of previous studies regarding the experiences of African Americans in the workforce, the present study found that some principals did not focus on race at all, while most treated all the teaching staff with equity. This finding contradicts existing knowledge about the issue (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). The only discrepancy about this finding was that a few African American teachers reported the assignment a more significant workload during events, such as graduation ceremonies and proms. Some of the interviewees also noted that their school had a majority of African American teachers, and therefore felt that there were no issues with racism. The generalizability of this study's results implies that racism may only be a significant factor in schools where African American teachers are a minority. Contrary, Kendie (2019) shared that any race can experience issues with racism, even African Americans. He further noted that racism deals with beliefs and concepts that can change from one day to the next. In this study, the findings also have implications for the concept of anti-racism leadership, as they indicated that the leadership concept might be irrelevant when principals adopt the professional standards for effective school leadership.

It is essential to note that, while three interviewees mentioned racial discrimination in their responses, almost all of these comments relate to their college experience or work at a previous job. For example, participant Nessie complained that she faced significant obstacles in the banking industry and not considered for a promotion or salary increase, despite having a better educational background and admitting to working harder than most of her colleagues. However, none of the interviewees'

responses reported a pattern of such experiences in their current workplace. In other words, while the issue of racial discrimination is still societally relevant, it may also be pressing in the contemporary educational sector. From this perspective, the findings of the study contradict those of previous research, acknowledging the existence of racial discrimination at educational institutions (Wilson, Dilulio, Bose, & Levendusky, 2018). However, it is relevant to highlight that most studies confirming the existence of this disturbing phenomenon in schools focus on students rather than teachers. The question raises an inquiry of whether their findings could apply to an analysis of African American teachers and their work conditions. This problem, therefore, requires further research.

The absence of a clear anti-racist focus on principals' leadership can connect with the consideration above. Given none of the teachers reported perceiving major signs of discrimination at their current workplace, further research on the need to establish anti-racist policies is required. The principals decided to treat all subordinates equally. Therefore, maybe the most effective strategy is not to overcome the problem of racial discrimination but to prevent the phenomenon altogether. To achieve this goal, principals need to establish policies and procedures that involve all stakeholders (staff, parents, community & students).

The concept of anti-racism leadership may be more pressing in schools where African American teachers constitute a minority group and where adverse incidences related to race occur more often. Previous research contended that the concept of anti-racist leadership connects to social justice and focuses on the abolishment of such power imbalances. It extends beyond the simple idea of supporting teachers and the initiation of diversity initiatives, to address the systemic issues, which create and promote racism and inequality in the school setting (Bogotch, 2014; Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Anti-

racist leaders actively drive change and refuse to accept an unequal distribution of power in their schools, districts, and communities (Bogotch, 2014). Anti-racism supports the idea that anti-racism leadership is necessary, primarily in schools where African American teachers are under-represented. Gooden and Dantly (2012) noted that, in such settings, it is critical for leaders to demonstrate an awareness of the need for change and take steps to implement measures, which work against the disparity and improve the numbers of African Americans teacher-leaders within their schools. Anti-racism leadership relates to critical leadership theories within the context of African American teachers and leaders. These theories deconstruct the policies, practices, and social functions, which created power imbalances in American schools, resulting in the marginalization of African American students and staff (Brown, 2004; Horsford et al., 2011).

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Leadership Practices and Low Teacher Morale**

The first research question explored African American teachers' descriptions of their morale levels and the causes of low morale. According to the study results, they overwhelmingly described their morale as low. Similarly, Gist (2018) reported that African American teachers exhibit some of the highest percentages of negative outcomes (e.g., turnover and attrition). So although African American teachers are more likely to remain in schools that enroll African American students, they have higher teacher attrition rates than other racial groups. These attrition rates are even higher in charter schools (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015; Gist, 2018). Slightly over 78% of the teacher participants reported low morale when asked about the relationship between a principal's

leadership style and a teacher's morale, with respondents indicating that specific leadership practices, such as micromanaging teachers, cause low morale.

Other negative leadership practices were reported (e.g., berating teachers in students' presence, ignoring teachers' needs, principals' lack of involvement in activities assigned to teachers, poor school management), all of which are aligned with related literature (Noguera, 2015). As this study shows, a principal's leadership style is a critical determinant of teachers' morale. Study results further indicated several causes of low teacher morale, including lack of autonomy for veteran teachers, little teacher support on student disruptions, and limited leadership development opportunities. Additionally, teachers indicated poor relationships with their principals, stifling of teacher creativity, teachers' inability to give input on decisions involving students and staff, an unreasonably high workload, low teacher pay, and students' negative attitudes toward education all contribute to their low morale.

Some of the factors contributing to low teacher morale can lead to African American teachers leaving the profession. According to the United Negro College Fund (2008), over 40% of our public schools had no African American teachers; African American males were cited as most absent from classrooms, making up only 2% of the nation's teachers. Gist (2018) shared that African American teachers are less likely to be hired, have lower ratings on performance evaluations than teachers from other racial groups, and are more often terminated due to school closures than other groups.

The goal of this study was to determine which leadership styles boost or improve teacher morale. Given this objective, it is essential to note that factors other than principals' behavior may cause low morale, such as stress (Edmonds, 2009); school culture (Blackburn, 2015); work characteristics (intrinsic characteristics like autonomy

and meaningfulness and extrinsic characteristics like salary and benefits) (Ayele, 2014; Kuskü, 2003; She-Cheng & Lin, 2011); unmet needs (physiological, safety, social, esteem, self-actualization) (Ayele, 2014); job satisfaction (Himli et al., 2016); and administrative support and leadership (Roelen et al., 2008). We must also address the profound impact of the psychological and emotional factors that influence teacher morale.

According to the data, respondents' backgrounds and life experiences could also be connected to their low morale. More specifically, quite a few of the teacher participants noted that they became teachers due to pressure from family members. Two participants, in particular, Anthony and Valencia, directly attested to many of their family members being educators, and most of the other interviewees expressed the same. Many study participants reported wanting to pursue other passions. However, Ellis (2015) acknowledged that sincere interest in the profession is critical to holding a teaching job—the absence of this interest might severely affect teachers' motivation.

Interviewees' responses to the first eight interview questions supported the assumption that teachers' lack of sincere interest in the profession may have caused their low morale. For instance, participant Shelley complained about not pursuing a psychology degree but an education degree instead since she already had a bachelor's degree in English. Her decision suggests that some of the respondents did not feel justified in their decisions to become teachers. Thus, low morale among these respondents could be explained by low satisfaction levels with their work responsibilities. While low teacher morale is not solely attributed to a lack of interest in the profession, this could be a reason.



Study results indicate that "relationships with family" and "work-life balance" may also affect teacher morale. Three out of the fourteen participants are single parents with more than three children, which often requires significant balancing efforts and can negatively impact teachers' consistent production at work (Helliwell, 2015). For instance, participant Valencia, a middle school teacher, takes care of five daughters, a granddaughter, and a pet. Attending to family members' needs might interfere with some respondents' ability to embrace the teaching profession fully. Therefore, principals' efforts to address low morale causes may be more effective when considering external influences and managing only those things within their authority. Incorporating effective leadership practices (e.g., communication, support, autonomy) rather than contrary leadership practices (e.g., micromanagement) can improve African American teachers' morale. Issues related to racial discrimination may also affect teachers' morale; however, all respondents indicated in interview question 6 that they did not feel as if they were impacted by racial and gender discrimination at their schools. Figure 1 shows the factors that contribute to low morale among African American teachers.

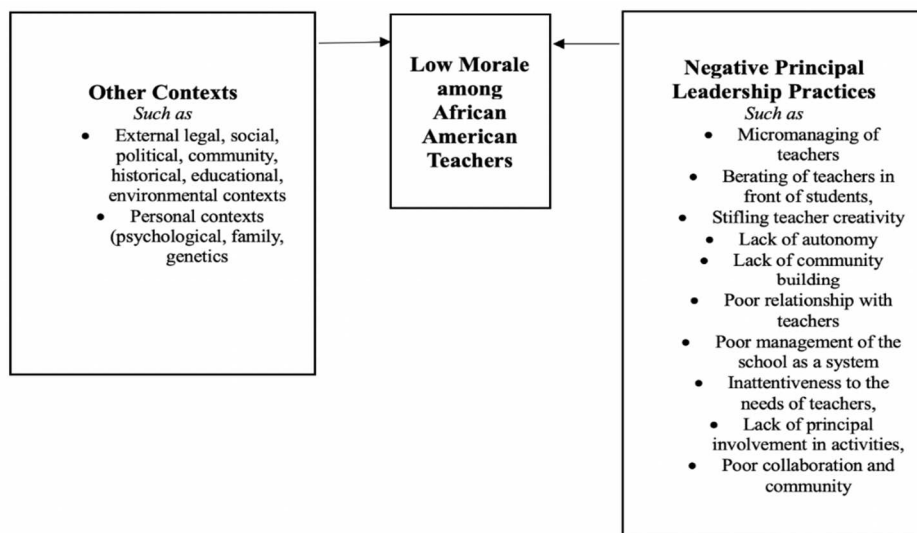


Figure 5.1: Causes of Low Morale Among African American Teachers.

### **Principal Leadership Styles Identified in This Study**

The second research question was designed to identify the leadership practices that influenced performance, satisfaction, and morale for African American teachers. However, it is essential to first understand the relationship between the three, with teacher morale being given special consideration. High performance and satisfaction levels indicate high teacher morale levels, while low morale is associated with dissatisfaction, low attendance, absenteeism, low performance, and burnout (Blackburn, 2015; Littleford, 2007). Study results indicated several factors that influence teacher performance and satisfaction, including teacher support (e.g., teachers having mentors, veteran teacher autonomy, principal constructive guidance), which leads to better teacher performance. Study findings were also aligned with the literature on principal leadership.

In addition to a general study of principal leadership styles, those styles commonly exhibited by principals referenced in this study were particularly important. According to the data, principals' four leadership styles from the rural school district in this study include authoritative, situational, laissez-faire, and transformational. These leadership styles identified the teacher participants' descriptions of their principals' leadership attributes and practices. The most common leadership style employed by principals in the rural school district was "authoritative leadership." While only one participant mentioned this style by name, 74% of the responses included descriptions like "micromanager" and "doing things her way." Authoritative leadership is synonymous with "autocratic leadership." As addressed in the literature review, authoritative leaders have complete control over decision-making with little or no input from subordinates. Autocratic leadership is based on authoritarian control over employees (Maqsood et al., 2013), evidenced by micromanagement.

Respondents who highlighted this leadership style generally reported low morale as they felt that their creativity was stifled. They had no autonomy over their work despite their years of experience. These participants also reported poor relationships between the principal and other teachers, limited teacher involvement in decision-making (if any), and significant "griping" among teachers. This dissatisfaction with authoritative leadership is aligned with the literature. Hassan, Shah, Zaman, and Ikramullah (2011), point out that authoritative leadership provides few opportunities for teachers and team members to make suggestions, which offers insight into the employee dissatisfaction that stems from leaders not trusting their staff. Authoritative leaders focus mainly on performance with little emphasis on the team, and they assume that employees are irresponsible, lazy, and unreliable. Authoritative leaders rely on power, authority, manipulation, and hard work to get the job done (Goleman, 2000).

The ineffectiveness of authoritative leadership could be attributed to each participant's work-life balance. Most participants have large families and many responsibilities, which Hart-Johnson (2017) stated, can negatively influence a teacher's ability to perform at a high level. When a person has many responsibilities at home, being outside the home (for example, teaching at a school) could be a refreshing change. They may experience fulfillment associated with work and enjoy flexibility unavailable in the home. However, a principal with an authoritative leadership style obviates this individual's potential flexibility, contributing to fatigue and anxiety.

Although "situational leadership" was not identified by name, some study participants stated that their principals agreed with their ideas on some occasions, but not 100% of the time. Other participants shared that their principals agreed with their ideas if they supported the school's mission and goals or aligned with set standards. These

explanations indicate situational leadership, which is appropriate to a given situation at a given time. As noted in the literature, situational leaders adjust their leadership styles to fit the circumstance or situation (Hattock et al., 2016). Study participants identified both directive and supportive attributes in principals' leadership practices, aligned with the situational leadership literature. According to Ghazzawi et al. (2017), situational leadership connects directive and supportive dimensions, each of which must be used effectively in the situation being addressed. Situational leadership could very well be effective in some settings. However, it was perceived negatively by the sample of African American teachers in the current study, given its lack of consistency in which decision-making is based on the details of each situation (Magee, 2015).

Some of the teacher participants described their principal's characteristics similar to the elements of "laissez-faire leadership," using terms like uninvolved, invisible, and disinterested in solving problems. The laissez-faire leader is uninvolved or disengaged when performing his or her duties. Laissez-faire leadership also requires the least managerial oversight (Rashid et al., 2013). It is characterized by a leader being indifferent to workers' activities and ignoring problems in the workplace. These leaders also fail to monitor workers' performance, and authority is delegated to any willing person (Edmonds, 2009). According to the data, most principals described in the district of the study were not laissez-faire leaders. However, participants stated that this type of leadership leads to chaos, more instances of students' behavioral problems, and lower teacher morale. Respondents indicated that they have to solve several problems each day, some of which require a principal's assistance. Principals who engage in laissez-faire leadership are not likely to assist, which leads to these leaders being viewed negatively.

Finally, although participants did not explicitly identify "transformational leadership," nearly 29% pointed out that their principals have an open-door policy, encourage the sharing of ideas, clearly define goals, and show concern for students and teachers, all of which are essential elements of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders engage with others in a manner that boosts everyone's motivation and sense of morality (Hearn, 2013; Northouse, 2004). Some transformational leadership traits can be described as an idealized influence (holding others' trust and acting as their role model), inspirational motivation (providing a vision and inspiring others), intellectual stimulation (encouraging creativity and innovation), and individualized consideration (demonstrating genuine concern for peoples' well-being).

The literature supports the positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher morale. For instance, Lambersky (2016) found that transformational leaders support teachers' and students' emotional and affective needs, positively affecting teacher morale. Jolley (2016) noted that transformational leadership influenced teachers' self-efficacy through creativity, professional development, vicarious experience, and vision. Study participants preferred this leadership style, as indicated by their recommendations for actions principals can take to increase teachers' happiness levels at work. Participants also stated that principals should promote creativity, facilitate autonomy, demonstrate support, and provide mentorship, all of which are attributes and transformational leadership outcomes. The practical application of transformation leadership by principals includes team-building activities and customized approaches for each teacher. The literature suggests that these elements are essential to the success of transformational leaders.

## **Leadership Practices and Anti-Racism Decision-Making**

The third research question was designed to determine if African American teachers thought their principals' intentionally considered anti-racism concepts when making decisions. The racial context was particularly crucial in this study, given its implications. African American teachers navigate an educated workforce influenced by longstanding social, political, systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014). Accordingly, one of the study goals was to explore whether the principals' leadership styles included anti-racist techniques. As leadership practice, anti-racism involves consciously restructuring practices and attitudes to ensure equal power among teachers and public recognition of African American teachers and their White counterparts. They exemplify a commitment to shared values. Additionally, anti-racism involves supporting African American teachers' decisions as opposed to suppressing their views and ideas.

Contrary to previous studies regarding African Americans' experiences in the workforce, the present study found that some principals did not focus on race at all, while most treated all the teaching staff with equity. This finding contradicts existing knowledge about the issue (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). The only discrepancy about this finding was that a few African American teachers reported a more significant workload during events, such as graduation ceremonies and proms. Some interviewees also noted that their school had a majority of African American teachers and therefore had no racism issues. This study's generalizability may imply that racism may only be a significant factor in schools where African American teachers are a minority. Contrary, Kendie (2019) shared that any race, including African Americans, can demonstrate racist

behaviors. He further exclaimed that racism beliefs and ideas that can change from day-to-day depending on the situation. The findings also have implications for the concept of anti-racism leadership, as they indicated that the leadership concept might be irrelevant when principals adopt the professional standards for effective school leadership.

It is essential to note that, while many interviewees mentioned racial discrimination in their responses, the three participants' comments relate to their college experience or work at a previous job. For example, participant Nessie complained that she faced significant obstacles in the banking industry and not considered for a promotion or salary increase, despite having a better educational background and admitting to working harder than most of her colleagues. However, none of the interviewees' responses reported a pattern of such experiences in their current workplace. In other words, while the issue of racial discrimination is still societally relevant, it was less pressing in the educational settings for this research study. Conversely, previous research acknowledges the existence of racial discrimination at educational institutions (Wilson, Dilulio, Bose, & Levendusky, 2018). This problem, therefore, requires further research.

The absence of a clear anti-racism focus on principals' leadership can connect with the consideration above. Given none of the teachers reported perceiving major signs of discrimination at their current workplace, further research on the need for maintaining anti-racism policies is required. The principals decided to treat all subordinates equally. Therefore, maybe the most effective strategy is not to overcome racial discrimination but to prevent the phenomenon altogether. To achieve this goal, principals must establish policies and procedures to address racial issues and concerns, as addressed in the previous subsection.

The concept of anti-racism leadership may be more pressing in schools where African American teachers constitute a minority group and where adverse incidences related to race occur more often. Previous research contended that the concept of anti-racism leadership connects to social justice and focuses on the abolishment of such power imbalances. It extends beyond the simple idea of supporting teachers and initiating diversity initiatives to address the systemic issues that create and promote racism and inequality in the school setting (Bogotch, 2014; Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Anti-racism leaders actively drive change and refuse to accept an unequal distribution of power in their schools, districts, and communities (Bogotch, 2014). Anti-racism supports the idea that anti-racism leadership is necessary, primarily in schools where African American teachers are under-represented. Gooden and Dantly (2012) noted that, in such settings, it is critical for leaders to demonstrate an awareness of the need for change and take steps to implement measures that work against the disparity and improve the numbers of African Americans teacher-leaders within their schools. Anti-racism leadership relates to critical leadership theories within the context of African American teachers and leaders. These theories deconstruct the policies, practices, and social functions, which created power imbalances in American schools, resulting in the marginalization of African American students and staff (Brown, 2004; Horsford et al., 2011).

According to the data, principals did not focus on race at all as all participants acknowledged that their principals treated the entire teaching staff equitably. However, there are contradictory viewpoints in the literature (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). The only discrepancy related to this finding was that a few African American teachers reported being assigned a more significant workload during events (e.g., graduation



ceremonies, proms). Some participants also believed that most of the teachers at their school were African American, so there were no racism issues. Contrary to research, Kendie (2019) stated that a person of any race could hold and execute racist behaviors; it is not off-limits to African Americans. Kendie (2019) strongly promotes anti-racism. Like everything else, anti-racism is about practice, regular practice, and reflecting on our approach. Kendie (2019) adds that we must continuously strive to build an anti-racism society. An anti-racism society is not governed by fear and hate and cynicism but of equity, justice, and truth.

It is essential to note that while a few participants indeed mentioned racial discrimination in their responses, these comments were usually related to their college experiences or some other workplace, not the district they currently teach. For example, participant Nessie complained that she faced various banking industry obstacles, such as not being considered for a promotion or salary increase despite having a stronger educational background and working harder than most of her colleagues. However, none of the participants' responses showed a pattern of such experiences in their current workplace. In other words, while racial discrimination is still an issue in today's society, it was not identified in this study. Nonetheless, it is relevant to highlight that most studies confirm the existence of African American teachers' racial discrimination.

### **Implications for Practice**

Research (Edmonds, 2009; Houchard, 2005) has shown that a principal's leadership practices, considering that the principal is responsible for creating and managing the school's culture and community, are essential to teacher morale. Teacher morale is connected to the overall school environment, both academically and socially (Finnigan & Gross, 2007). Research also indicates that highly talented teachers leave the

profession to pursue other careers at astounding rates (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) because of several factors that contribute to low morale and job satisfaction. Because of these outcomes, it is important to determine the factors that affect teacher morale and implement professional development training for principals on effective practices by which high levels of teacher morale can be maintained. Responsive, effective leadership practices enable principals to address the negative factors contributing to low teacher morale. Principals also influence decisions regarding teacher compensation as competitive pay is important to most working people. Principals are also in the best positions to provide teachers with manageable workloads. Leadership style, compensation, and low-demand workloads all contribute to teachers' happiness and morale levels.

However, a few additional factors can affect the morale of African American teachers. Short and Wilton (2016) pointed out how longstanding social, political, systemic, and historical legacies of marginalization and disenfranchisement have shaped and influenced the current education system. There are differences in African American teacher preparation, characteristics of the schools where these teachers are employed, and why they leave the profession (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Petchauer, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014). A school principal may be able to significantly influence teacher morale based on conventional and classical leadership approaches. However, their influence on teacher morale may be limited based on psychological qualities like courage and fortitude.

Participants in the current study reported that their principals treated all subordinates equally, and no signs of discrimination in their current workplaces. Therefore, maybe the most effective strategy is not to overcome racial discrimination but

to prevent it altogether. To achieve this goal, principals must be consistent in their decision-making and establish policies to address racism.

Anti-racism in school leadership may be a more important issue in schools where African American teachers are the minority or schools where race-related issues often occur. As seen in the literature, anti-racist leadership has connections to social justice and focuses on abolishing power imbalances. Anti-racism in school leadership extends beyond principals, simply supporting teachers and initiating diversity initiatives to address systemic issues involving race and inequality in schools (Bogotch, 2014; Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Anti-racism leaders actively drive change and refuse to accept unequal distributions of power in their schools, districts, and communities (Bogotch, 2014). Anti-racist leadership is necessary, especially in schools where African American teachers are under-represented. Gooden and Dantly (2012) noted that leaders must demonstrate awareness of the need for change in school settings and implement measures that counter disparities and promote higher numbers of African American teacher-leaders within their schools. Anti-racism leadership is related to critical leadership theories within the context of African American teachers and leaders, theories in which policies, practices, and social functions that created power imbalances in American schools and resulted in the marginalization of African American students and staff are deconstructed (Brown, 2004; Horsford et al., 2011).

Based on the study's findings, I developed four critical recommendations for improving morale among African American teachers centered on (1) more effective principal leadership, (2) the adoption of school leadership standards, (3) a more critical leadership approach, and (4) leaders adopting transformational leadership styles.

In terms of *more effective principal leadership*, we understand that principals are responsible for all staff's performance and morale. As such, principals should commit to certain types of leadership practices universally considered effective, such as strong communication, collaboration, team-building efforts, teacher empowerment, community building, recognition of teachers' performance, and empathy. Principals should also avoid certain ineffective practices, such as micromanagement, disrespecting teachers in students' presence, stifling teachers' creativity, failing to support teachers, being invisible as leaders, and treating teachers in ways that demonstrate inequality.

According to this study, African American teachers base effective leadership on three critical principles: principals being consistent, principals utilizing team-building efforts, and principals taking on personal approaches with their staff. Consistent adherence to school policies and consistent decision-making are both essential as they are a natural protection against race- or gender-based discrimination. Team-building activities improve the group atmosphere, encourage relationships between colleagues, increase the chances of helping each other, ensure cooperation, and help teachers with challenging home situations to shift their minds away from family and household responsibilities. Further, principals taking on more personal approaches when dealing with their staff is crucial because it makes teachers more satisfied with their jobs and makes them feel more motivated. The data in this study suggests that many African American teachers have problems maintaining a healthy work-life balance, so a principal taking on a more personal approach when dealing with teachers can be impactful.

Study findings indicate that *adopting standards established by professional institutions governing school leadership* will improve teacher morale. Professional standards promote effective and equitable teacher engagement in including principles

such as equality, respect, community-building, support for teachers' professional development, support for student welfare, and communication. African American teachers must perceive these school leadership standards' consistent use because teachers may perceive this as discrimination when principals are not compatible.

In schools where African American teachers or other non-White people constitute the minority of the teaching staff, it is essential that principals consciously adopt and implement *critical approaches to leadership*, for example, incorporating anti-racism into their practices. The intentional adoption of such methods to leadership will encourage leaders to proactively respond to power imbalance issues, which can harm African American teachers' morale. Also, anti-racism leadership practices should be unique to the school setting. In this particular study, racism was not identified. However, principals need to be proactive and put anti-racist leadership in place for staff and students. The policies should ensure equal treatment for all employees and students, with no emphasis on special treatment for teachers and students from minority groups

Both the literature and this study's findings indicate that teachers overwhelmingly prefer principals who employ a transformational leadership style. This type of leadership improves teacher morale and leads to high teacher satisfaction and performance and low teacher attrition rates. Transformational leadership helps principals lead effectively, and it also promotes teamwork to fulfill the school's missions and goals. Despite the importance of transformational leadership, we must emphasize that it should not be applied as a universal concept that functions the same for all teachers. Instead, leaders must employ personalized strategies to motivate their teachers. Findings from this study suggest that while some African American teachers are driven by passion and a sincere interest in making the world a better place, others became teachers due to family pressure and the

lack of other alternatives. Thus, the incentives created in the paradigm of transformational leadership (e.g., professional development) may not be effective for all teachers. This paradigm means that principals should connect with all of their teachers, understand their unique needs and personal interests, and create incentives to motivate them to continue teaching.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research should include a study to replicate principal leadership styles and teacher morale but focus on elementary school teachers and principals to compare the results. Future research should also include school principals to participate in an interview to rate themselves to reach their results with the staff analysis to make principals aware of how others view them compared to how they view themselves. Future studies can also focus on individual schools compared to several schools in one district to give principals a look at how the faculty and staff consider them. Recommendations for policy and procedures are vital for school principals to incorporate leadership styles beneficial to increasing morale in the schools. School principals have faced many leadership challenges since the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Under the ESSA, the principal's role has changed from being a building overseer and manager to an instructional leader (Whitney, 2008). With the demands placed on school principals, principals need to implement diverse leadership styles required for success. The leadership styles put a genuine concern on morale and job satisfaction (Hamilton, 2007 & Denton, 2009). School principals should implement leadership styles that promote teamwork, shared decisions, and open communication. Teachers should feel that they are an integral part of the school body and that they are working in collaboration with the

administrator to accomplish the school's goals and mission, which is to promote student achievement.

It is also important to focus not only on the principals and staff but also on students who play an intricate role in the school environment. Their well-being and morale are important to having a productive school environment. High-quality teacher-student interactions are important to academic achievement and social success for children at all levels of education (Murray, Murray, and Wass, 2008). Teacher attitude and beliefs also help determine the kinds of relationships teachers are able and willing to construct with children and how those relationships will either support or challenge the development of children in their classrooms (Hamre, Pianta, Burchinal, Field, LoCasale-Crouch, Downer, Howes, LaParo, & Scott-Little, 2012; and Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007). Future research could include students in primary through high school to complete a survey to express their levels of morale when interacting with their teachers and peers. The principals can develop an instructional plan to coordinate a curriculum that lists goals and objectives for students to build morale with peers and teachers.

### **Conclusion of the Research Study**

This qualitative study explored African American teachers' perspectives concerning how school principals' leadership styles affect teachers' morale. The study also examined how principals' leadership practices affect job performance and job satisfaction. Lastly, the study addressed whether principals' leadership styles incorporate anti-racism techniques. This study's findings are critical keys regarding how school principals' leadership styles negatively influenced teachers' morale. They utilized such practices as micromanagement, lack of autonomy, lack of support for teachers, and poor relationships between teachers and school leaders. Contrarily, effective leadership

practices involve facilitating a school culture that is psychologically healthy for teachers and students, promoting safe work environments, demonstrating proactive promotion of equity, and encouraging collaboration with other community members. Principals who have the competencies required by school leadership standards can implement effective leadership practices that promote positive morale among African American teachers.

As opposed to the authoritative style, the transformational leadership style leads to positive outcomes that support and enhance morale levels for African American teachers. This study also indicates that the teaching staff's racial composition may determine the extent to which teachers experience racial discrimination. When African American teachers constituted the minority among the teaching staff, adopting the critical leadership approach promoted social justice and supported their morale. Efforts to improve teacher morale for African American teachers based on careful consideration of the environmental and demographic contexts in which they teach. Finally, teachers expressed the need for principals to provide more support, particularly in social conditions and self-actualization, which is the top tier. Like Maslow hierarchy of needs, teachers at the self-actualization level perceive reality accurately, have a sense of wonder and gratitude about life. Additionally, they are not self-centered but rather problem-centered (Maslow, 1999). The goal of individuals who are operating at this level is to improve in life. They want to contribute to the purpose and plan of the school's agenda. When principals seek input from teachers when making decisions, teachers feel validated and part of the school process, boosting their morale.

The literature supports the fact that it takes several positive leadership styles to promote teachers' positive morale to feel supported. The leadership behaviors should include sharing leadership and empowering others. Most importantly, teachers want to



think that their opinions and feelings matter. If teachers assess the principal's leadership style as good, they will usually display high morale; when the principal's leadership style is not good, they will probably show low morale. In other words, the school prediction's overall morale could be based on the teachers' perception of the principals' leadership style.

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## Appendix A: Human Research Approval



### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

Ernestine Young  
680 Horseshoe Rd  
Salters, SC 29590 USA

Re: **Pro00090009**

Dear Ernestine Young:

This is to certify that the research study ***Present and Former African American Teachers' Perception of Principal Leadership Styles and Impact on Teacher Morale*** was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) and 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7), the study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **6/21/2019**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the study remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research study could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this study was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

All related research records are to be retained for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). If you have questions, contact Lisa Johnson at [lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:lisaj@mailbox.sc.edu) or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Johnson".

Lisa M. Johnson  
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager

**Appendix B: Superintendent Permission Letter**

June 24, 2019

Williamsburg County School District  
500 North Academy Street  
Kingstree, South Carolina 29556

Dear Dr. Wilder:

I am a doctoral student at the University of South Carolina. I have completed all of my course work and am currently working on my dissertation. The topic I have chosen to conduct my research project is “Present and Former African American Teachers' Perception of Principal Leadership Styles and Impact on Teacher Morale.” The purpose of this study is to explore African American teachers’ perspectives on how a principal’s leadership style influences teacher morale and explore if anti-racism plays a role in the decisions of the school principals. The study will explore this relationship based on the perspective of 14 middle and high school teachers in the district. The research approach for the study will be qualitative. A phenomenological interpretive design will be adopted for the study. Understanding of the functional constructs of principal leadership styles and behavior and how they interface with teacher morale will have important implications for effective principal leadership practices that lead to improved teacher morale, performance, and retention.

With your permission, I plan to interview the teachers who meet the study requirements of being a teacher in the district with two or more years’ experience working under the leadership of the current principal. The interview process will consist of fifteen open-ended questions in which the teacher will be asked to respond. All responses will be captured with the recorder and hand-written notes. The interview session will take fifty minutes to complete. Once the interview has been completed, the teacher may be contacted again if there are any follow-up questions. The session will take place in the conference room at the local library. Records of all research inputs will be locked in a file cabinet, with only the researcher having access to the information. A copy of the interview questions is attached for your reference. If you permit me to conduct this research in the district, please sign and date this letter. Thank you for your support and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via telephone at 843-382-7367 or email [stine@wcsd.k12.sc.us](mailto:stine@wcsd.k12.sc.us). My committee chair is Dr. Spencer Platt, who can be contacted at [SPlatt@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:SPlatt@mailbox.sc.edu).

Signature of Superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely, Ernestine Young, Doctoral Candidate, University of South Carolina

C: Dr. Spencer Platt, University of South Carolina Advisor

## Appendix C: Letter to Participants

April 20, 2019

Dear Educator,

My name is Ernestine Young, and I am a doctoral student at the University of South Carolina. I have completed all course work and am currently working on my dissertation. The topic I have chosen to conduct my research project is “Present and Former African American Teachers' Perception of Principal Leadership Styles and Impact on Teacher Morale.” The purpose of this study is to explore African American teachers' perspectives on how the principal's leadership style influences teacher morale and explore if anti-racism plays a role in the decisions of the school principals. The study will explore this relationship based on the perspective of 14 teachers from a rural school district in South Carolina. The research approach for the study will be qualitative. A phenomenological interpretive design will be adopted for the study. Understanding of the functional constructs of principal leadership styles and behavior and how they interface with teacher morale will have important implications for effective principal leadership practices that lead to improved teacher morale, performance, and retention.

I am inviting you to participate in this research study. You meet the study requirements of being a teacher in the district with two or more years' experience working under the leadership of the current principal. The interview process will consist of fifteen open-ended questions in which you will be asked to respond. All responses will be captured with the recorder and hand-written notes. The interview session will take fifty minutes to complete. Once the interview has been completed, you may be contacted again if there are any follow-up questions. The session will take place in the conference room at the local library. Records of all research inputs will be locked in a file cabinet, with only the researcher having access to the information. By participating in this study, you can provide data to help educators and policymakers understand the problem and develop better insights on how to possibly reduce the problem of low teacher morale while identifying effective principal leadership practices for the rural district to hire and retain teachers.

There is no payment associated with your participation in this research study. The research is solely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences if you withdraw. Your responses to the interview questions will also be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by calling 843-382-7367 (cell) or email me at [stine@wcsd.k12.sc.us](mailto:stine@wcsd.k12.sc.us)

Sincerely,

Ernestine Young  
Doctoral Candidate, University of South Carolina

## **Appendix D: Interview Questions (Current Teachers)**

*APPENDIX Below is a list of open-ended teacher interview questions. The questions are in response to principal leadership style and impact on teacher morale.*

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Why did you pursue education?
3. What is your educational philosophy?
4. Who is the person that influence you?
5. What obstacles did you encounter in life and your career? How did you overcome it?
6. Did you ever experience racial barriers in college and the educational arena?
7. What is your relationship with the students that you teach?
8. What is your relationship with the students that you teach?
9. How do you perceive the leadership style of your principal?
10. How do you perceive the relationship between the leadership style of the school principal and teacher morale?
11. In anti-racism, a practice of the principal, explain? (In what ways does the principal consciously restructure practices and attitudes to ensure that power is equal among African American and Whites)
12. Does the principal publicly recognize African Americans as well as their counterparts who exemplify a commitment to shared values?
13. Does the principal support the decisions African American teachers make on their own or suppress their views and ideas?
14. What strategies does the principal use to assist teachers who are not performing at an acceptable level?
15. Do you believe the principal treats staff with equal respect, explain a scenario when it did or did not happen?
16. In what ways do the principal show concern for the faculty and staff?
17. How does the principal build leaders throughout the building?

18. How does the principal develop cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with?
19. the principal challenges people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work?
20. Do you feel that the African American teaching load is greater than your counterparts?
21. Is there is a great deal of griping and arguing among teachers regarding the principal's leadership style, provide examples of this scenario?
22. If I could earn as much money in another occupation, would you leave the profession? Explain your feelings about why you would or would not?
23. In what ways does your principal make your work easier and more pleasant or the opposite?



## **Appendix E: Interview Questions (Former Teachers)**

*Below is a list of open-ended teacher interview questions. The questions are in response to principal leadership style and impact on teacher morale.*

1. Tell me about yourself?
2. Why did you pursue education?
3. What is your educational philosophy?
4. Who is the person that influence you?
4. What obstacles did you encounter in life and your career? How did you overcome it?
5. Did you ever experience racial barriers in college and the educational arena?
6. What is your relationship with the students that you teach?
7. What is your relationship with the students that you teach?
8. How do you perceive the leadership style of your principal?
9. How do you perceive the relationship between the leadership style of the school principal and teacher morale?
10. In anti-racism, a practice of the principal, explain? (In what ways does the principal consciously restructure practices and attitudes to ensure that power is equal among African American and Whites)
11. Does the principal publicly recognize African Americans as well as their counterparts who exemplify a commitment to shared values?
12. Do the principal support the decisions African American teachers make on their own, or does he suppress their views and ideas?
13. What strategies does the principal use to assist teachers who are not performing at an acceptable level?
14. Do you believe the principal treats staff with equal respect, explain a scenario when it did or did not happen?
15. In what ways do the principal show concern for the faculty and staff?

16. How does the principal build leaders throughout the building?
17. How does the principal develop cooperative relationships among the people he/she works with?
18. How do the principal challenges people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work?
19. Do you feel that the African American teaching load is greater than your counterparts?
20. Is there is a great deal of griping and arguing among teachers regarding the principal's leadership style, provide examples of this scenario?
21. If I could earn as much money in another occupation, would you leave the profession? Explain your feelings about why you would or would not?
22. In what ways does your principal make your work easier and more pleasant or the opposite
23. Why did you leave the district?
24. Would you return to the district?

## **Appendix F: Consent Form for Teachers**

### **TITLE OF STUDY**

African American Teachers' Perception of Principal Leadership Styles and How They Impact Teacher Morale

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Years of Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Years at Current School: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Consent Form for Teachers**

You are invited to take part in a research study on the above subject. The purpose of the research is to explore the leadership styles that school principals use in the district and how such leadership behaviors and associated practices influence the morale of African American teachers in a rural district. Your participation is requested as you meet the study requirements of being a teacher in the Williamsburg County School District with two or more years' experience working under the leadership of the current principal. It is important to provide you with information on why the research is being conducted and what it will involve before you make a decision to participate. Detailed information regarding the study is, therefore, provided in this form to help you understand the study. Please read the information contained in this document carefully before you agree to become a participant in the study. If you need more information, please ask the researcher.

## **Procedure**

The study will involve the following processes: The participants will be asked to read and sign the consent form (This document) before participation in the study.

## **Nature of the Study**

Your participation in the study is voluntary. You are under no compulsion to participate in the study, and you are free to leave the study at any time and for any reason, even after you have signed the consent form.

## **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are no risks associated with participating in this study, except for the possibility of stress from any unpleasant experiences related to the research phenomena. You may withdraw from the interview if you experience stress and withdraw from answering a question if you do not feel comfortable.

There are no rewards associated with being a participant in the study. However, by your participation, you provide data to help educators and policymakers understand the problem and develop better insights on how to reduce the problem of low teacher morale while identifying effective principal leadership practices for the rural district to hire and retain teachers.

## **Compensation**

A summary of the research findings and a thank you card will be provided to you to acknowledge your participation in the study.

## **Confidentiality**

Ethical research involves protecting the safety and confidentiality of research participants. Your identity and school of employment will not be disclosed for any reason. No personal identifying information is required from you. Your responses to the interview questions will also be kept confidential. Records of all research inputs will be locked in a safe location, with only the researcher having access to the information.

## **Researcher's Role**

The researcher has the primary responsibility for assuring that the study is conducted ethically and that the outcomes of the study are truthful. The researcher is responsible for the safety of all research participants. As the principal investigator, I am personally responsible for meeting all legal and ethical aspects of the study, which includes protecting participants' rights and safety.

## **Participant's Role**

You are required to read the consent form completely and to ask the researcher any questions you may have concerning this research activity. Be sure that you understand your rights as outlined in this document and the requirements of the study. Should you decide at any time not to continue with the study, please inform the researcher. You are encouraged to keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

## **Contacts and Questions**

The name of the primary researcher is Ernestine Young. The primary researcher may be reached by phone or email.

## Statement of Consent

I have read the information above carefully. I understand the study, and I understand my rights well enough to decide on participation. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can choose to withdraw from participating in this study at any time and for any reason. By signing below, I state my agreement to the terms above.

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name and Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Electronic signatures can also be used where both parties have agreed to sign the form electronically.